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THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATIONS INTO NEW AGE SPIRITUALITIES

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND

DOMINIC FRASER CORRYWRIGHT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a detailed examination of theoretical and empirical approaches to New Age spiritualities. Examples are taken from the specific context of the South West of England. It defines a sophisticated hermeneutic for research into New Age spiritualities which is carried out through an empirical investigation. The empirical study focuses on two network hubs based in the South West, *The Spark*, a free newspaper, and *Psychology of Vision*, an organisation offering psychological courses on human potential. Research into these networks has been carried out on three levels: analysis of their material dimension and functions; a questionnaire survey; and in-depth interviews. Social research and ethnography inform the qualitative methodology and methods.

The first section deals with theoretical perspectives on New Age spiritualities. Analysis of current descriptions of the field shows that many typologies of the thought and practices of those within the New Age have not reflected the actual experiences and beliefs of those they seek to describe. A new theoretical model is proposed with foundations in the epistemological discourses of Foucault, Kuhn and feminist spirituality. The second section provides a detailed methodological framework for the research using the idea of a weblike network to represent the practices and beliefs of those within New Age spiritualities. The empirical investigations are then explored to refine and to provide ideographic evidence for the web model. The final section re-evaluates theoretical constructions of spiritualities in the New Age.

The research shows that the eclectic, diverse and dynamic nature of New Age spiritualities requires methods of research that highlight plurality. Furthermore, the multiple webs of individuals within New Age spiritualities should be defined primarily in terms of praxis. The conclusions of this research will be valid beyond the field of New Age spiritualities. The web-form of social and intellectual interaction informs a broader perspective of knowledge and experience in a plural, postmodern world.

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I dedicate this work to my mother, for broadening my understanding, and to my wife, Suzanne, for opening my heart.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. S. J.', written over the 'SIGNED:' label.

DATE: 29th June
2001

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INTRODUCTION

We may be seeing the beginnings of the reintegration of our culture, a new possibility of the unity of consciousness. ... Such a new integration will be based on the rejection of all univocal understandings of reality, of all identifications of reality with reality itself. It will recognise the multiplicity of the human spirit ... It will recognise that in both scientific and religious culture all we have finally are symbols, but that there is an enormous difference between the dead letter and the living word. (Robert Bellah, 1970: 246)

Spirituality is fundamental because it's at the core of my being. It is the whole and the part, it is the universe in me. I don't think it can be taught but it can be talked about. There is no one way, there are as many ways as there are people. (SS1.13)

The subject-matter of spirituality is of perennial human concern. The spiritual quest has found numerous cultural expressions throughout history, yet the way in which this concern is now studied, through critical and comparative reflection in a global, cross-cultural context, is a specific development of the twentieth century. (Ursula King, 1997: 661)

There has been a substantial growth in recent academic research on the New Age, yet there remain significant gaps in the literature on the empirical basis of New Age spiritualities. New studies are required about New Age organisations and the practices of New Agers developing personal spiritual paths. Despite the increasing research there are still many inaccuracies in the way the field is defined. The causes of these shortcomings are misapplied methodologies and hermeneutical presuppositions that are inadequate to describe the manifold phenomena. The results of such research methods often convey eclectic

superficiality, and miss the fecundity and dynamism felt by those who espouse New Age ideas. I redress this imbalance by defining methodological assumptions that accurately situate New Age thinking within the twentieth and twenty-first century context, and by giving voice to the people who are involved in the practices of the New Age spiritualities.

A central feature of contemporary religiosity is the development of new networks and social relationships as means of expressing personal spiritualities. The emphasis for the exploration of religious ideas, in terms of social organisation, is “bottom-up” rather than “top-down”; from the experience and practices of participants rather than the doctrinal expressions of elected or self-appointed leaders. This represents an inversion of the structures of doctrinal dissemination common in traditional religions. The main elements that have generated such novel praxis-oriented approaches of contemporary spiritualities are those of postmodernity: the death of the exclusively male God; death of the author(ity) of unitary tradition; the corollary focus on the reader, the subject, the individuals who form the bodies of the churches.

One key premise of this thesis is that the emphasis of New Age spiritualities is upon experience. Spiritual knowledge is perceived to develop primarily through practice. That is, spirituality is lived and practised *prior* to its expression as doctrine, before the written word. By “prior” I mean chronologically prior in the sense that spiritual experience of the world leads to a search for the doctrines and beliefs that support

this experiential understanding. I also take prior to mean epistemologically and ontologically superseding in the sense of taking priority in the worldview of the spiritual practitioner. Both these definitions presume a pre-linguistic model of human existence that at first sight appears irredeemably naive. However, despite the weight of linguistic philosophical constructions which show we cannot stand outside language and that it is our language which formulates the world, there are still many people who work with a model of an otherworldly experience of which one cannot speak.¹ Unlike the earlier Wittgenstein who famously refused to affirm anything beyond this statement, there is in fact a prolixity of expressions about the ineffable realm of spiritual experience. There is, also, a worthy intellectual history for the idea of “before the word the deed”, a history from which the New Age seekers for spiritual experience emerge as one contemporary and dynamic strand.

It would be incorrect for us to glibly deny the validity of this experiential worldview on the basis of a perceived epistemological fallacy about language. Indeed a reading of the later Wittgenstein might not allow us to do so. As “language-games” religions have their own determinants for the truth claims of propositions. A significant determinant for contemporary spirituality is a belief in the reality of spiritual experience.

¹ Linda Woodhead has affirmed this pre-linguistic conception found in contemporary spirituality when she defines the New Spiritualities as thoroughly un-postmodern in the philosophical sense: “Its experience based epistemology assumes a non-linguistic ideologically untainted experience, the rejection of which is the starting-point of postmodern linguistic theory.” (Woodhead, 1993: 176)

Statements about spiritual experiences presuppose this belief. And before we focus our criticism too keenly on the isolated notion of spiritual experience as a discrete idea or doctrine Wittgenstein warns “what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole)” (1969: 141). That is to say, to discover the meanings attached to praxis and experience in New Age spiritualities we need to consider the wider set of beliefs and practices supporting these themes, the system from which they emerge, “the element in which arguments have their life” (Wittgenstein, 1969: 105).

This thesis highlights the ways in which practice, experience and ideas interconnect. It examines the modalities by which individuals and organisations within New Age spiritualities engage with their own particular worldviews and connect with those of other individuals, groups, and organisations in the process of their spiritual quests. A significant part of the thesis will consider how these quests, or pathways, can be modelled. A framework is required to organise the research data gathered by the scholar observing and recording the functions of the networks of the New Age spiritualities. I have used the idea of webs, in which the threads are created by individuals’ activities and beliefs, to organise my description of New Age spiritualities. As a visual image one can imagine threads of greater or lesser thickness and strength to represent levels of significance between the practitioner and his or her many connections. The web model is organic in the sense that it reflects the mobility of individuals’ developing and changing practices and

beliefs within New Age spiritualities. The genealogies of other organic models, such as the arboretic or the rhizome, do not sufficiently describe the ephemera that are included in the paths of the New Age seekers. The tree is too purposive and linear while the rhizome is too arbitrary. The web however is diaphanous like the spiritualities New Agers seek and its spiral form affirms the creative self-reflective process of the central web-maker. At the same time the image of the web includes manifold interconnections representative of the eclectic plethora of influences upon the New Age seeker.

The idea of multiple networks that are woven like webs and are substantively located and defined primarily by practices is thus a central concept in this thesis. The adoption of the web model creates a flexible skeletal structure to define network connections and, as an organic form, allows for the limitless differentiations of the individual webs. It is intended that the application of the web model will provide space for analyses focusing on specificity, depth and context in the living, practised tradition of New Age spiritualities. In defining the primacy of praxis I do not intend to reduce the subjects of this study to *Easy Rider*, road movie, experience junkies (though some individuals may fit this description). Rather I hope to extend our understanding of contemporary religiosity as an aspect of, influenced by and influencing, contemporary culture.

New Age spiritualities form one significant facet of the field of contemporary spirituality. They are a historically specific formation of a

certain kind of religiosity. Wouter Hanegraaff has expressed this specific formation in terms of a history of western esoterical traditions. He has linked this history of esotericism to the emergence of secular culture. By so doing Hanegraaff straddles two important themes in the study of New Age phenomena: firstly he is representative of scholars who have adopted a historical comparative approach to the study of New Age (Melton, 1988, 1992; Ellwood, 1992; Olds, 1993); secondly his study relates to those scholars who find essential characteristics of New Age as indicative of secular society and the Weberian process of secularisation (Van Ness, 1996; Bruce, 2000; Puttick, 2000). For Paul Heelas the term "New Age" has come "to acquire a relatively distinctive currency" (1996: 16). Heelas includes historical elements in his description of a New Age Movement, but the core to his understanding of the New Age is a specific set of beliefs. "[New Age] has come to designate those who maintain that inner spirituality - embedded within the self and the natural order as a whole - serves as *the* key to moving from all that is wrong with life to all that is right" (16). By concentrating on expressing the beliefs of New Agers as means of placing them in a cultural-comparative religious and historical framework, Heelas' approach is similar to the work of a number of other scholars of the New Age (Woods, 1982; York, 1995; Rose, 1996, 1998; Chryssides, 1999: 278-341).

Another approach is taken by "insiders" whose perspectives on the New Age offer more differentiated descriptions of the belief systems of the

eclectic set of New Age philosophies and religious orientations than the somewhat reductive perspective of Heelas (Ferguson, 1987; Bloom, 1991; Di Carlo, 1996). Most recently Sutcliffe and Bowman have stated their “frustration with the cavalier use to which the label ‘New Age’ has been put”. They claim “it is high time to problematise the term, while simultaneously beginning more thorough and wide-ranging excavations of, and differentiations between, the kinds of religiosity that the label has sought to identify” (2000: 1).

Influenced by these earlier and concurrent trends in the study of the New Age, my own study into New Age spiritualities problematises and differentiates the set of New Age spiritualities. The key difference between my work and that of some other scholars working in this field is my adoption of an approach focused on establishing empirical data from practitioners and emphasising the role of practices over beliefs. These practical research objectives are supported by a thorough theoretical analysis of both scholarly critical studies and insider expressions of the religiosity of New Age spiritualities. However, even before developing my own critical perspectives on New Age spiritualities, I assumed that some elements of New Age thinking (though by no means all) offer significant, valid and sophisticated responses to modernity and the a-historical themes of religion.

Research into the multifarious elements that constitute New Age spiritualities requires a rigorous method for observation. Sandra Harding’s useful distinction between three modes of thought, “Method,

Methodology and Epistemology” (1987), underpins the structure of this thesis. Harding’s definitions have been adopted here to fasten and make rigid terms that can have a loose meaning or be loosely applied. “A research *method* is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence”; “a *methodology* is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed”; “an *epistemology* is a theory of knowledge” (1987: 2-3). These discrete but related themes form hermeneutic parameters for the approach taken in this thesis. The process, an inversion of Harding’s presentation, begins with epistemology, before developing methodology and consequently methods.

The kind of thinking involved in how we know what we know is entwined both with my own intellectual predilections (and therefore the way in which I engage with studies of religious phenomena in general), and with much thought within New Age spiritualities. For another aspect of this thesis, which distinguishes it from other studies on New Age, is the claim that some facets of New Age spiritualities function as a mode of knowledge which critiques other epistemic modalities while espousing a “new world view” (Di Carlo, 1996). Epistemology thus runs through the thesis as a critical referent for my scholarly activity and for the religious practices and beliefs of New Age spiritualities.

Methodology follows from these epistemological conceptions. From a theory of how we know the world it becomes possible to develop a theory of how we might study the world. My two key criteria for such a study are simply those of accuracy and utility. Yet while these appear

straightforward expectations of any methodology, it becomes clear in this thesis that a number of studies fail on basic claims to be accurate and useful. The failure of certain methodologies lies in the models used to describe the world. Often these models are applied without sufficient reflection on the structure they impose upon the object of study. Thus, as Harding points out in the same paper, when studying gender issues simple adumbrations such as “adding women” to “traditional analyses”, may not result in accurate portrayals. Methodology requires thorough analytical reflection before it becomes a tool for research. Yet even a sophisticated methodology does not provide the fine tools required in field research.

Research methods are the ways, the techniques, adopted for carrying out research. New Age spiritualities are not amenable to exactly the same methods as would be adopted for New Religious Movements, neo-Paganism or any of the world religions (York, 1995: Simes, 1995). For despite the evident historical foundations of New Age spiritualities, there are novel expressions and modes of interconnection that necessitate new methods for their study. The prime element of the way in which scholars need to study this novelty, is to consider the development of networks as the means of organisation and expression most relevant to New Age spiritualities. These networks are frequently, but not always, non-hierarchical and suggest a flattened model akin to the idea of a web. This may be contrasted, as Simes points out, with the “image of the tree” which is the best model for neo-Paganism as religiously oriented

phenomena, for all Pagans “share some form of theism” (1995: 491, 505ff). The fact that many individuals within New Age spiritualities practise their personalised forms of religiosity in private, at home or through informal networks, leads to difficulties in gaining access to information on practices and practitioners. However, the formal and public aspects of New Age spiritualities, predominantly events, courses and publications, allow access to informal networks, as most individuals mix multiple components to create their own unique webs of beliefs and practices.

I began researching and writing this thesis at the end of the twentieth century and have finished it at the beginning of the twenty-first. The process has taken me far beyond the boundaries of my initial plans for this project. My investigations have crossed the millennium with the subjects of my study, and I have found new horizons in the study of religions. Certain of my own assumptions, such as the notion that millennial beliefs constituted a keystone of New Age ideas, have been empirically overwritten by the responses of the research sample and the progress of time. Other presumptions, such as the genuine and deep quest for “direction and meaning, for wholeness and transcendence” (King, 1997: 662) of those within the New Age spiritualities, have been borne out in my research. My own quest for meaning has, of course, grown and been transformed as part of the process of my research. Indeed, it was an intrinsic personal interest in spirituality which led me to study others spiritualities. In that sense I am an “insider”, as perhaps are

many scholars of religion. The web in which I am woven includes the academic study of religion, which itself is “a modern quest” (Smart, 1999: ix). During the writing of this thesis I have moved from teaching History and Religious Studies at secondary school to lecturing on Approaches to Religious Studies at the University of Bristol and, most recently, setting up and leading a Religious Studies undergraduate programme at Oxford Brookes University. My own undergraduate studies in the History of Ideas have led me into the Study of Religions. Thus my approach is predominantly formed by a historical perspective and an understanding which has tended to locate ideas and the mind as pre-eminent in the study of culture and human history. But religions are informed by practice, the religious is underpinned by spiritual praxis; I, with others, “consider the spiritual and spirituality as the heart of religion or its highest ideal, encountered particularly in religious and mystical experience” (King, 1997: 661). So this thesis has become an investigation into experience and practical knowledge as much as theoretical knowledge. My intellectual history, assumptions and predispositions are part of the web that constructs and defines the way in which this thesis has been written.

The thesis is divided into four distinct parts: “Theoretical Perspectives”, “Methodological Foundations”, “Empirical Investigations” and “Conceptual Evaluations”. Part I includes two chapters, the first of which forms a preliminary literature review of some key typologies used in the definition of the New Age. The second chapter describes core theoretical

foundations for the following analyses of the phenomena of New Age spiritualities. Essentially these theoretical foundations are comprised by: Foucault's critique of power and the structure of discourse, which is applied to the academic discourse that categorises and defines New Age in the study of religions; Kuhn's historical conception of "paradigm shifts" as it is applied to society and culture; feminist criticisms of patriarchal forms in the history of religions and spiritual feminism, both as a contiguous critique of traditional epistemology and corollary expression of religiosity within New Age spiritualities.

Part II on Methodological Foundations (chapters 3 and 4) examines in detail the model of a web and how it can be applied to New Age spiritualities. The vital correlation and sympathy between a model for study and the object studied is examined and explained. Chapter 4 investigates the way social research and ethnomethodology provide useful methods for this study.

Part III elucidates the empirical findings of the research. A comparative analysis of data gathered from a questionnaire, "Survey of Spirituality", is provided in chapter 5. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with specific data on the two main organisations, *The Spark* and *Psychology of Vision*, on which empirical research was carried out between 1997 and 2000. The particular histories and backgrounds of each organisation are briefly presented before a detailed analysis of their role within the wider web of New Age spiritualities is given. Each chapter includes descriptions of the webs created by the individuals involved with each organisation.

Part IV revisits the methodological and epistemological foundations established in Parts I and II through the empirical investigations of Part III to re-evaluate New Age spiritualities as webs of praxis. Some consideration is paid to negative appraisals of those elements relevant to the specific New Age spiritualities discussed in this thesis. The conclusions to this study and directions for further research are briefly presented at the end of the thesis.

As far as possible I have avoided making extensive footnotes. Where the information is relevant to my argument I have included information in the body of the text. Occasionally footnotes have become necessary when a correlate point needs to be made, but insertion into the main text would be deleterious to the overall line of argument. The practice of writing long footnotes is akin to making comments in the margin by the careful interactive reader, that is, it is the right of the reader to marginalise, but the author should refrain from such a practice. This point pertains to citing the considerable debt owed to other authors. I have adopted the most widely used reference style, the Harvard author-date system. Hence all sources used in the thesis are listed in the bibliography. I have not, however, limited the bibliography only to these references. While it is clear I could not reference all the published and unpublished journals, books, web sites, leaflets and other printed material I have read during my research, I have included some sources that undoubtedly influenced the style and concepts I use and which may be evident, at least implicitly, in this thesis.

Citation to the material of the questionnaires and interviews has been coded. The letters SS stand for “Survey of Spirituality”. The first number following the letters refers to the research group: “1” relates to respondents from *The Spark* sample; “2” relates to respondents from the *Psychology of Vision* sample. The second number simply refers to respondents in numerical sequence. Individuals who completed questionnaires and were interviewed are filed using the same number, which refers to both questionnaire response and interview transcription.

I have sought to follow some of the complex and occasionally tortuous pathways that structure the webs of New Age spiritualities. While I have a beginning and an end in the expression of these ideas for this thesis, the webs themselves extend ever more subtly into the wider culture in which they have their life. The sources of my research, especially those of an empirical nature, exist more fully and intricately outside my written thesis. I hope to have done them justice in my descriptions and analyses, while also refracting some of the light of their dynamic lives.

PART I

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

CHAPTER 1

DESCRIPTIONS OF NEW AGE SPIRITUALITIES

Our frustration [is] with the cavalier use to which the label "New Age" has been put in recent decades, both in the popular media and by many scholars of religion. (Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman, 2000: 1)

General systems theory is symptomatic of a change in our world-view. No longer do we see the world in a blind play of atoms, but rather a great organisation. (Ludwig von Bertalanffy in Ferguson, 1980: 157)

Scientific 'laws' do not depict cosmic truths, they are only celebrations of temporary consistencies: fairly reliable general statements about particular events. (Kit Pedler, 1979: 30)

1.1 CRITIQUE OF EXISTING DESCRIPTIVE MODELS

Many current descriptions of spirituality in the New Age are partial at best, misleading at worst. Frequently this situation is the result of unreflective applications of models, and modes of thought, that are insufficient to accurately describe the manifold phenomena of New Age spiritualities. In some cases these applications involve simple naiveté; in others a wilful disregard of evidence, in order to incorporate the phenomena either in previously established taxonomies within a discipline, or to fit a new typology. Too often the specificities of New Age thought and practice are subsumed under a generic discourse of competing and overlapping concepts such as "secularisation", "privatisation", "globalisation", "narcissism", "self-religiosity" "postmodernism". The unfortunate truth, regarding academic research in this area, is that it has been, according to David Lyon, "a bit of a circus"

(1993: 117). Having disclosed these limitations, my purpose is to formulate an approach that avoids these shortfalls. Simply, the two criteria for such an approach are accuracy and utility. However, it would be vainglorious and crassly unreflective to assert that the descriptive methodology I will propose as currently accurate and useful can be the final analysis of the subject. Indeed, it is one of my core contentions that time and change are integral qualities in the New Age spiritualities, which therefore defy complete categorical descriptions. If Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* has any lasting significance with regard to the ontological status of our critical faculty, it must be to this end: that spatial and temporal considerations are crucial factors that determine against final descriptions. "The predicate of space is only applicable to things in so far as they appear to us, that is, are objects of sensibility", or in other words, our subjectivity. "Time is nothing else than the form of the internal sense, that is, of the intuitions of the self and of our internal sense. For time cannot be any determination of outward phenomena" (Kant, 1787: 46 and 49 respectively).

Nevertheless, failure to attempt critical sophistication, to provide a working model, is disingenuous if it is simply to "get on with explaining what is out there". For, underlying each description is a worldview constructed of many layers of epistemological and ontological suppositions. For my part, the underlying worldview of the scholar is a critical referent in the delineation of analytical method, and in the description of the ostensible object of analysis. Thus, I necessarily begin with reflections on critical analysis, and return to them in Nietzschean

style, an "eternal return" to origins, to define the liminality of what is possible to describe, accurately and usefully, in the New Age spiritualities.

1.2 A NOTE ON EPISTEMOLOGY

The multiple tensions within descriptive analysis defy attempts at absolute accuracy of categorisation. For when the scholar begins to construct a typology she or he begins also to create a framework of shadows, of closure. And all attempts to create a final model, which fully represents an external set of circumstances to the 'nth' degree, are gross. The complexity of relations between phenomena, historical and present, dynamic and evolving, challenge any typology, which is, perforce, static. Thus Michel Foucault formed a hermeneutic which sought not the creative feat of edifices and descriptive structures, but one which discovered discontinuities. He actively worked against descriptive typologies that valorised methods of structure in analysis. Strangely, because many of the totalised views of the New Age would be anathema to him, Foucault's thought reflects one strand in the multiplicity of New Age spiritualities: these phenomena defy categorisation in linear structural terms. Furthermore, as theories of knowledge, the New Age spiritualities more closely resemble Foucault's search for the cracks and fissures of the reified systems of modern scientific epistemology than monolithic attempts to define how we *really* know the world.

Nevertheless, the overall cast of Foucault's thinking is negative, while

most of the New Age spiritualities are determinedly optimistic. Therefore, while the critical methods of thought in some ways resemble Foucault's deconstructivist tendency, there is equally a movement towards what Fritjof Capra has called "constructivism".¹ It is an apparent paradox to suggest both modes of thought are to be found in New Age thinking when they are so opposed. Yet, a central theme of this thesis is to highlight these plural modes of thought and expression.

The New Age emerges *both* out of the historical conditions and processes that have constructed unified theories *and* is a product of postmodernity with its fractured, deconstructed models of knowledge.² When Capra seeks to define boundaries for new paradigm thinking in science, he declares that the old metaphor of building up knowledge, of fundamental laws and basic building blocks, is "crumbling" to be replaced by "network as a metaphor for knowledge" (Capra, 1992: xiii-xiv). The crumbling edifice is partly the result of Foucauldian critiques, with those of more philosophical and linguistic deconstructivists, such as Deleuze and Guattari (1983), or epistemological "anarchists" such as Feyerabend (1975). Indeed, it is possible to recognise similarities between Capra's network model for knowledge and Deleuze' and Guattari's rhizomorphic model (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 10-15). Both refute historical closure,

¹Capra describes a shift from objective science to "epistemic" science as a key feature of new paradigm thinking in science. "The people who are in the forefront of this research tend to say that a school known as "constructivism" is the appropriate epistemology. It says that what we observe is not a world that exists objectively and is then represented but is rather a world that is created in the process of knowing" (1992: 123-124).

²The issue as to whether New Age thought should be defined as "modernist" or "postmodern" is interestingly considered in *Religion*, "Aspects of Religion" 1993, 23: 2 – see especially Linda Woodhead, "Post-Christian Spiritualities", (176-7).

arboretic linear models and the possibility of complete descriptions of the world, in the way the *Annalistes* attempted total history. It would be fallacious, however, to assume that constructivism and rhizomorphism lead to similarly singular conclusions, or approximations as to what the world is *really* like.

There are many visions in the New Age spiritualities of what being human in a phenomenal and noumenal world really is like. A useful image to illustrate the mixture of opposing constructive and deconstructive tendencies in New Age thinking can be found in the use of the theory of "dissipative structures". It is a theory developed by Ilya Prigogine, a Belgian chemist, who won the Nobel Prize in 1977. The theory explains the movement from simple to higher order structures. Certain structures are "closed" systems, where there is no internal transformation. Other structures, such as living beings and cultural systems, Prigogine has noted, contain continually transforming energy. This energy and the complexity of these structures lead to instability, but instead of collapse and entropy, the systems move into a higher order. These systems are dissipative structures.³

One way of illustrating the patterns of thought to be found within the New Age spiritualities is to compare Foucault's manner of criticism with the idea of entropy, and that of the New Age with the idea of "dissipative structures". The former represents a key feature of an older paradigm of knowledge, which is pessimistic and presumes instability, while the latter

³The theory is adequately outlined in Ferguson (1987: 162-7). Prigogine's own explanations are obviously more complex (1971: 1-13; 1997: 66-72).

accepts instability but incorporates this notion into a new paradigm of transformation. The very fact that the theory of dissipative structures is given extensive exposition and expansion by Marilyn Ferguson (cited by Michael York as one of three "leading New Age spokespersons", York, 1995: 48) seems to confirm the applicability of this metaphor. More significantly, the movement from entropy, which is the second law of thermodynamics,⁴ to dissipative structures as the focal paradigm for certain natural processes, is indicative of the changing nature of scientific and New Age views themselves. Many of the key features of the New Age, from beliefs to network relationships and social organisations, are more fluid than static.

The issue of how we describe a set of phenomena or even create boundaries for the set itself, is central to the problems encountered in descriptions of New Age spiritualities specifically. Few current texts succeed in effectively reflecting the fluid historical morphology of New Age ideas. The main reason for this signal failure is ill-conceived methodology. A prime example of lack of self-reflexivity in considering methodological shortcomings is to be found in Wouter Hanegraaff's otherwise excellent research into New Age thought, *New Age Religion and Secular Culture* (1996). Hanegraaff's selection of material seems encyclopaedic for the reader with little knowledge of the field, but his research actually represents only a partial and historically limited view.

⁴Entropy was briefly a paradigm in the ecological strand of New Age thought. It was used as a critique of certain scientific-industrial processes at the same time as being a natural law of the universe. See Kit Pedler's discussion of the life of Gaia – "all processes tend to disorder", (1979: 30-34).

Stuart Rose highlights just some omissions:

Ram Dass, possibly the most respected New Age spiritual teacher in America, and author of, among others, what has been described as the New Age 'bible'; in England, William Bloom and the activities of 'Alternatives' (which has become probably the largest and most active New Age forum in Europe); Arne Naess and deep ecology ...

Clearly, he wants to wrap up the New Age into a nice neat package, but in order to do this he excludes so much. The New Age is more expansive than Hanegraaff would have us believe. It isn't tidy and any attempts to force tidiness upon it end up missing many of its key issues. (Rose, 1998: 421)

Rose correctly explains that it is Hanegraaff's research methodology which is the reason for these omissions. Hanegraaff obtained his information from texts collected from a limited number of New Age book shops in the Netherlands between 1990 and 1992. The result is a singular expression of a "New Age Religion" which is extensive, but by no means comprehensive. This is especially so given the considerable fluctuations of interest in New Age authors, and the complex corollaries related to publishing, availability, sales figures, and whether books remain in print. Rose cites Shirley MacLaine as an instance of an author "who used to be widely read" (1998: 420) but has become unpopular in the 1990's.

Hanegraaff also pays little heed to issues related to the relative influence of books in general, to specific texts or authors, and to the readers of the texts - that is, to the nuances of critical theory. The history of the study of religion itself is an object lesson against over-reliance on texts as expressions of religiosity. This is especially the case in the New Age,

where texts are part of a wider web of ideas developing in a multi-layered network of orality and other mediums of expression: including workshops, businesses, cyber and web-based systems, the arts and lifestyle choices. In short, for such a rigorous scholar, Hanegraaff is curiously unreflective about his selection of source material.

The alternative strategy to such an ivory-towered research method involves at least some measure of empirical research. Here, there has been a more focused approach to research into the New Age, but methodological issues again have significantly hampered accuracy. Despite the proliferation and prolixity of primary research material there is a dearth of substantive, exact scholarly research. The crucial factors involved in this lack of precision are inappropriate methodological frameworks applied to the peculiarly indeterminate phenomena. Too often conclusions have been drawn that this equates to superficiality of the phenomena (MacRobert, 1988; O'Hara, 1988; Bro, 1993; Bruce, 1995, 1998 - see chapter 8 below). However, as will be shown in the following sections, the real fault lies with intransigent models used to describe New Age phenomena based upon epistemologies which are themselves too inflexible.

1.3 TYPOLOGIES OF THE NEW AGE

My overview of a selection of sociological typologies and their underlying theories and presuppositions rests upon a much broader critique of knowledge in the modern world. The methodology presupposed is deeply

flawed on the practical level of accuracy and use, as well as on the theoretical level of the possibility of a static objective representation of New Age spiritualities. The challenge remains of adequately responding to an eclectic, unsystematic set of networks with brief histories that do not conform to previously established approaches in the study of religions.

Within the field of mechanical engineering there are people who are known to choose a hammer when faced with apparently intransigent problems. A mechanic once explained to me that when the spanner fractures and the seized bolt sheers off under excess strain the hammer itself is not at fault. The fault lies with the mechanic, both in excess of zeal and in choice of hammer. Just this is the problem with many of the social scientific approaches to the New Age. The tools of Social Science are largely mundane and worldly, the antithesis of New Age interpretations which are often cosmic and otherworldly. A sociologist studying New Age spirituality might make the claim that this begs the question. The sociologist might say that these "cosmic" interpretations have their roots in the world, and it would be a fool who failed to recognise the social, political, psychological and historical aspects of any worldview. Yet the New Age adherent might justifiably make the counter-claim that such a view is reductive for it fails to comprehend the overarching significance of cosmic events. Moreover it falls foul of the materialist presumption of quantity, with no explicit recognition of the spiritual life, which is the essence of the New Age worldview. As such it is social scientific methods that beg the question. These arguments are two

closed circles of incompatibility.

The approach taken in my study is sympathetic with the New Age perspective, while also paying due respect to social research methodologies that have many substantive uses. Simply, however, a solely social scientific study of New Age spiritualities is flawed because it uses the wrong tools. The search for typological clarity is of limited relevance and use and should be seen as reflective of a sociological worldview. Some sociologists have asserted the existence of typological patterns and therefore found them. However, these typologies do not accurately or fully describe the phenomena of the New Age.

There are many highly respected sociologists working in the field of New Religions and New Age (Barker, 1989; Bruce, 1985, 1998; Parsons, 1993, Wilson, 1982, 1988). A number of scholars writing on the New Age have written on New Religious Movements (NRMs), rather than the New Age as such, but conflate New Age with NRMs in their typologies. The least successful studies, in terms of an explanation of the actual beliefs and practices of the NRMs, are confounded by the diversity of New Age spiritualities and arrive at confused renderings of the social and political organisation of the NRMs. Gerald Parsons is an example of this approach. Parsons (1993) takes his self-confessed "deliberately imprecise" approach to reflect and respect the "stubbornly diverse nature of the movements". He arrives at a typology of three categories based on notional constructs of "origin or interest":

1. "NRMs which are clearly and straightforwardly derived from traditional world religions". For example;

ISKCON, (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), FWBO (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order) and the London and Birmingham Churches of Christ.

2. NRMs which "although identifiably related to major religious traditions ... are manifestly less directly or conventionally derived from them and remain distinct and distant from the 'mainstream' of the traditions involved". For example: again the London and Birmingham Churches of Christ (to some extent because they are not accepted within mainstream British Christianity) and Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism (here Parsons mistakenly conflates Nichiren Shoshu with the lay organisation of Soka Gakkai).

3. NRMs which are "both harder to define and even broader in scope than the two preceding groups". For example: 'Self-religions' psychotherapies, New Age Mysticism and alternative spiritualities. (Parsons, 1993: 279-285)

The third category most closely covers the field of this thesis, but Parsons has done little more than create a "sub-category" for the study of New Age spiritualities. He has not elucidated a *method* of study. Furthermore, he has clouded research by inferring a greater similarity of structure than is actually evident; he has created his third category to conform to a notional framework of NRMs, rather than the reality of different practices and beliefs, or worldviews. It is with some apparent dissatisfaction (at least with regard to the creation of a clear model) that Parsons concludes his survey with the observation that:

The penumbra of interest in New Religious Movements and New Age philosophies amounts to a significant - if also immensely confused and unsystematic - contribution to the 'pick and mix' outlook characteristic of a great deal of popular religiosity in modern and contemporary Britain. (Parsons, 1993: 298)

A more clear-cut typology is offered by Roy Wallis in *The Elementary*

Forms of the New Religious Life (1984). Again his typology is tripartite, one which he defines as a "logical trichotomy" based not on "origin and interest", as Parsons typology is modelled, but on the "set of ways in which a New Religious Movement may orient itself to the social world into which it emerges" (Wallis, 1984: 4). Furthermore, he offers this trichotomy as a set of "ideal types" and specifies that "empirical instances will therefore only *approximate* to these types". The three types are:

1. World-Rejecting Movements. Examples given are: ISKCON, Moonies, Children of God, Manson Family. Wallis defines these movements as, "more *recognisably* religious than the world-affirming"; that, "rather than a life of *self-interest* ... [they] require a life of *service* to the guru or prophet" ; and there is a "close link between religious and political aspirations" (Wallis, 1984: 9-12)

2. World-Affirming Movements. Examples given are: TM, est, Soka Gakkai, Silva Mind Control, Scientology and Human Potential Movement. Wallis states that for these movements the "social order is not viewed as entirely and irredeemably unjust, nor society as having departed from God as in the world-rejecting case". Furthermore, "the spiritual dimension in particular is a matter of individual experience and individual *subjective* reality" (Wallis, 1984: 24-26)

3. World-Accommodating Movements. Examples given are: Neo-Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Renewal Movement. For these movements Wallis claims that, religion is not construed as a social matter but only of significance for the personal, interior life and that these NRMs have little effect and few implications for the world.

Paul Heelas suggests that *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* "is a strong candidate for the award of 'first useful textbook' on the new religions". He then goes on to show how flawed Wallis's typology actually is. For example, Soka Gakkai "is introduced in connection with the world-accommodating type" and later used "to illustrate the world-

affirming variety" (Heelas, 1985: 82). A similar point is also made by Kim Knott about ISKCON "which is classified by Wallis as world-rejecting [but] seen at times as affirming the world in its positive attitude to lay participation" (Knott, 1988: 171). Moreover, the term "accommodation" "does not appear to be a very satisfactory term to characterise movements which are engaged in religious protest against mainstream religious institutions" (Heelas, 1985: 87). Equally "the majority, if not all of the world-affirming movements introduced by Wallis aim at so much more than world-affirmation that characterisation in terms of this type can at best only convey part of the picture" (Heelas, 1985: 89). Finally, Heelas comments "perhaps the worst indictment of his typology would be to demonstrate that *these* actual cases do not in fact approximate as he would like us to believe, and that as a result they are misrepresented by the constructs" (Heelas, 1985: 89).

Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins offer another typology derived from the assumption of the decline of "civil religion". Civil religion is Robert Bellah's notion, established in the 1970's, of a specifically American formulation of Protestantism which he defined as "biblical religion" and "utilitarian individualism" (Bellah, 1976: 334). However, while a civil religion replaced that of an established state religion, according to this theory, certain events (notably, in America, the Vietnam war and Watergate) brought about a crisis and subsequent collapse of many people's beliefs. This led to a gap in the market for those seeking a religious commitment, into which the NRMs emerged. Many scholars are wont to use market place descriptions somewhat glibly. The "spiritual

supermarket", simile – cf INFORM's 2001 conference of the same title - reflects an unaccommodating materialist milieu that does not, from an insider's perspective, represent the sense of spiritual "destiny", a typically fatalist view held by many New Agers. The Anthony-Robbins typology outlines two distinct categories of NRM:

1. The Dualistic Movements may be defined as those movements which "reaffirm elements of traditional moral absolutism in an exaggerated and strident manner" (Wallis, 1984:2) Anthony and Robbins propose two types of dualistic movement: Neo-fundamentalist, for example, the Jesus People; and Revisionist Syncretic, for example, the Unification Church.

2. The Monistic Movements may be defined as those "movements that affirm relativistic and subjectivistic moral meaning systems". Again they define two types of monistic movement: "Technical", for example, TM, est, Scientology, ISKCON; and "Charismatic", for example, Meher Baba, Guru Maharaj-ji, Charles Manson.

The point in outlining these three typologies, by Parsons, Wallis and Anthony-Robbins, is to exemplify the variety of descriptive models used by social scientists. Furthermore it illustrates the inadequacy of such a procedure as regards an accurate description of what the adherents of a given New Age religion actually believe.

Quantitative methods have been suitable for discovering the numerical significance of some NRMs. There have been approximately 500 movements between 1945-1990 (Parsons, 1993: 277; Kim Knott cites 450, 1988: 161; Peter Clarke cites 400, 1988: 149). These methods are also successful in quantifying the numbers of people joining NRMs. However, as Steve Bruce notes, "when set against the general decline in Christian Churches [this] is trivial" (1995: 102). Although this deduction,

from a purely statistical analysis, gives no satisfactory account of the influence and significance of the ideas of NRMs. I challenge the validity of the entire project of mapping NRMs under typological boundaries both as to accuracy and meaningful use. Roy Wallis himself admits the weaknesses of such an approach:

It must be recognised, however, that any given body of phenomena is susceptible to classification in terms of an infinite number of typological schemes. Thus, ultimately, the test of a typology lies not in its components, but rather in the uses to which it can be put, particularly that of identifying the significant characteristics of the phenomenon in terms of a theory which turns out to be able to bear the heat of critical appraisal. (Wallis, 1984: 4)

It is my contention that under "heat", many of the "significant characteristics of the phenomenon" are not identified; some characteristics, especially those of social and political structures may usefully be identified. Equally, the theoretical presuppositions of Wallis's project have some relevance and value in the study of New Age spiritualities. But as with the typological and "number-crunching" approaches already referred to, these assessments are further reflections of a particular social scientific worldview itself, and are limited in expressing the dynamism inherent in New Age spiritualities.

The two prevailing assumptions of the sociological approach to NRMs are rationalisation and secularisation. Max Weber described the process of rationalisation as the consequence of modern industrialised society, whereby the increasing pressures of economy and the divisions of labour bring about a consequent "disenchantment with the world" for individual

humans. It leads to a shift from "ascription" to "achievement" in the work place so that status is considered from the position of "not *who* you are, but what you can *do*" (Wallis, 1984: 41).

It is interesting to compare this view to some other interpretations of industrialised society. A Marxist, dialectical materialist interpretation of the same phenomenon would be to emphasise the equally increasing division between bourgeois and proletariat and to posit the necessary future revolution consequent on these conditions. A Freudian psychological approach, recognising the same conditions, would highlight the compensatory development of neuroses (and probably equally delight in the decline of religion - cf. Freud's study on *The Future of an Illusion*, 1928). However, a Jungian approach, while accepting that, "for every piece of conscious life that loses its importance and value ... there arises a compensation in the unconscious" (Jung, 1933: 241), would assert that:

However far-fetched it may sound, experience shows that many neuroses are caused by the fact that people blind themselves to their own religious promptings because of a childish passion for rational enlightenment (Jung, 1933: 77).

The corollary to the process of rationalisation is the secularisation thesis, whereby rationalisation in the economic sphere is paralleled by rationalisation in the intellectual sphere and the consequence is the divesting of old superstitions. The most vigorous applications of this thesis seem to be products of the nineteenth century, being an amalgam of post-enlightenment positivism, Hegelian progress and Victorian

arrogance. The point I am making is that we have here theory and meta-theory. A phenomenon is described, which amounts to a theory of the nature of the object or event. Perspectives are then developed on the theory, which are meta-theories. The understanding that this is a necessary function of how we formulate our ideas about the world is one of the boons of the structural and post-structural critiques of knowledge. Nevertheless, the consequence of recognising the interpretative role of the observer is the necessity of presenting the assumptions underlying an apparently straightforward descriptive analysis of a phenomenon. That is, what are the theoretical presuppositions inherent in observational analysis? Any attempt to avoid responding to this question is naive.

Bryan Wilson's study of NRMs is representative of the strongest application of the secularisation thesis and is valuable for both its transparency and its polemic. Wilson states that NRMs are:

a confirmation of the process of secularisation. They indicate the extent to which religion has become inconsequential for modern society ... they add nothing to any prospective reintegration of society and contribute nothing towards the culture by which society might live. (Quoted in Wallis, 1984: 70)

Elsewhere Wilson affirms his position that, "from the perspective of religion, the single most important feature of the modern world is its secularity" (Wilson, 1988: 195). He is willing to admit that not all the evidence is "one-way", suggesting that "some apparently contrary indications can be invoked", namely, NRMs and the New Age. However, he considers these as marginal, for they represent the dying gasp of religion in response to the forceful march of rationality. Perhaps as a sop

to the value of religions, Wilson concedes that religiosity, or spirituality, might be inherent to the human condition. Yet, from a strictly Popperian perspective, Wilson makes his theory unfalsifiable by adding the possibility of the continuation of religious expression despite the inevitable victory of secularisation.

A review of the diverse contemporary manifestations of religiosity in the world might, indeed, at least superficially, lead to the conclusion that the present day is an age of unprecedented vigour. In the face of the overwhelming evidence ... such a view is untenable, but contemporary expressions of religion cannot be dismissed as merely incidental. Religion responds to certain deep-laid, perhaps atavistic, human needs, and, as such, something which passes for religion, no matter how different it may be from established, traditional and well-institutionalised forms, may well be a permanent phenomenon of human society, even if it prevails only at the margins and in the interstices of an increasingly rational structure. (Wilson, 1988: 201)

Wilson is by no means alone in his interpretation of the emergence, meaning and significance of NRMs and the New Age. A number of other sociological approaches rest on both the rationalisation and secularisation hypotheses. Some take Durkheim's functionalist view of religion reflecting the social structure of society and see NRMs as attempts to reverse the trend of secularisation. Others, such as James Davison Hunter, assert that "the source of the new religious consciousness is the anthropological protest against modernity" (1983: 7). New religions are therefore seen as "demodernising movements" which seek to "replicate" the sense of stability lost in the process of rationalisation. Their response is an increased "subjectivisation" (Gehlen) or "turning within" which *may* "translate into narcissism". Others, such as

Steve Bruce, emphasise the limited significance of the New Age against the backdrop of rationalisation. He states, "the New Age has far fewer behavioural consequences than sectarian religion", that it is "low impact and low salience" and that it has "little effect on radically changing the lives of most of its habitués" (1995: 118). The value of the New Age for Bruce is that it "exemplifies" and "points us to central features of modernity": notably the collapse of authoritarian knowledge, mass communication, relativism, individual assertions about epistemology and, finally, "this is the importance of the New Age. It illustrates the zenith of individualism" (1995: 122).

1.4 TWO FURTHER MODELS OF THE NEW AGE

There are some scholars working in the field of New Age whose approach is markedly less reductive. Both Paul Heelas and Michael York trace their intellectual lineage to sociological method and theory; both also rely on sociological typologies to a limited extent. However, both have also produced books recently (Heelas, 1996; York, 1995) which consider the phenomenon of the New Age more from a Religious Studies approach.

Kim Knott has succinctly defined the differentiation of Sociology and Religious Studies approaches. Knott recognises the imbalance of scholarship on the side of sociology by stating that, "remarkably few scholars have focused on the *religious* implications of new religious movements" (my emphasis, 1988: 160). She defines the sociological

approach as "horizontal", as that "which considers the phenomenon of new movements in relation to such things as the background of members, group types and social organisation". Knott then defines the Religious Studies (and Anthropology) approach as "vertical", as that "which investigates the *life* of a movement with particular regard to its religious and cultural sources" (my emphasis, 1988: 161.) Although this differentiation of methodology is a simplistic rendering, especially given the polymethodic nature of Religious Studies and its overlap with Sociology of Religion, it aptly characterises the limitations of many descriptions of the New Age.

While Knott's strict delineation between the two disciplines cannot be regarded as complete, and therefore is not fully accurate, it does indicate the *consequences* of research carried out within the disciplines. That is to say, the emphasis of sociological enquiry into "horizontal" issues militates against a final description that recognises the role of "vertical" issues. Thus, the praxis of New Age spiritualities is conceived in social terms and categorised according to the names of groups or therapies. The result is an inflexible framework that does not represent the beliefs and practices of those who attend such groups or therapies. This is especially the case regarding the ever-changing networks of the New Age, where the most comprehensible core concerns relate to spiritual values, beliefs and, more importantly, praxis. The "life" of the New Age spiritualities is best studied, therefore, primarily from the perspective of Religious Studies.

Paul Heelas refers to his own work as informed by the Religious Studies

approach evolved by Ninian Smart. But Heelas seems only to emphasise the preliminary position of a detached observer rather than develop any methodological sophistication with regard to the construction of theories or typologies. He states:

Following the principles emphasised by Ninian Smart - who has done more than any one else to develop the discipline in this country - the academic study of religion *must* remain *neutral* with regard to matters of ultimate truth ... Writing as a researcher ... one has to be agnostic with regard to the ultimate truth of what is taking place ... What can be done, however, is note evidence, perhaps of financial abuse, which makes it unlikely that those concerned are what they claim to be. (1996: 6)

While I would criticise this position as theoretically unsophisticated, Heelas has done more than any researcher to date in proposing a rational framework for the consideration of the New Age Movement. His collation and presentation of the multiplicity and mass of material is impressive. His text follows the vertical method, already described, in the presentation of the New Age Movement in three sections. First Heelas discusses the "portrayal" of the New Age movement, that is its key assumptions, historical background and current significance. Next Heelas considers the "appeal" of the New Age, that is, to whom do these ideas appeal and for what reasons? Finally he discusses its "effectiveness", which Heelas says is "the value of its capacity as a vehicle for introducing the utopian". This last section, while interesting, is of course the most *value*-laden and therefore least able to achieve what amounts to a dream of neutrality.

Two aspects of his work that require further consideration are his concept

of "Self-religions" and the inclusivity of his understanding of the New Age Movement. Self-religions is a notion coined by Heelas in 1982 in "Californian Self-Religions and Socialising the Subjective". It is the "unifying theme" of this latest work and has gained considerable currency, at least as a descriptor for new psychology and the Human Potential Movement. Heelas claims it is the "essential *lingua franca*" of the New Age Movement, though he admits there are "variations on the theme". The Self (capitalised) is the individual Spirit that is at once God and, with the corollary pantheist conception of God, is therefore universal also. While I do not debate the centrality of this idea in New Age thought, I confess dissatisfaction with the notion as an accurate essence of New Age spiritualities. It suggests the primacy of Self against the social or communal. But such a view is not representative of much New Age thought. It also seems to signify that interest in this Self is specific to the New Age Movement which it is not, a point illustrated for me by a friend who is a Zen Buddhist monk. In traditional Zen, the master Dogen writes in the *Shobogenzo*, section 1, *Genjokoan*:

To learn the Buddhist way is to learn about oneself. To learn about oneself is to forget oneself. To forget oneself is to perceive oneself as all things. To realise this is to cast off the body and mind of self and others.
(Dogen, 1988: 1,1)

Furthermore, "Self-religions" would be better described as "Self-Spiritualities". For Heelas includes in his definition of religion such organisations as *est* or Exegesis which are more accurately described as psychologically based courses with a spiritual dimension. Marilyn Ferguson has coined the term "psychotechnologies" for those New Age

practices that rely on seminars or courses to promote models or ideologies of the psyche. The idea behind the use of technologies is the notion of instrumental tools that are quite specifically aimed at self-realisation. The central concept is usually that of "transformation". Moreover, these organisations are not equivalent to parallel religious organisations.

This excessive breadth, or inclusivity, is a critical weakness in Heelas' theory. Lorne Dawson writes:

He folds much, perhaps too much, into his conception of the New Age Movement ... Analytically, ... Heelas' category is too omnivorous, threatening to eliminate any meaningful consideration of functional alternatives to the New Age and injuriously blurring our sense of the temporal and spatial location of this movement (1997: 391).

This also is a significant point of departure for Michael York. His text, *The Emerging Network* (1995) is more obviously of a sociological tenor, and his classifications are more defined, while his theory is more sophisticated. York discriminates between New Age and neo-Pagan Movements; he distinguishes between the significantly different historical traditions as well as the contemporary spokespersons or representatives of these two worldviews. York cites Monica Sjöö's virulent criticisms of the New Age from a neo-Pagan perspective: Sjöö considers the New Age as "patriarchal and politically reactionary", with "blatantly male gods" and scenarios of light fighting evil "taken straight from Tolkien". The New Age, Sjöö continues, is "a kind of spiritual yuppiedom or even Thatcherism" in its acceptance of the political and economic status quo.

Finally, she connects some of the New Age thinking with "some very reactionary and pro-fascist views" from the 1930's (see York, 1995: 122-124). At least York is more honestly responsive than Heelas to the self-descriptions of those within the two movements. Equally, however, he is willing to consider the many similarities and relationships between the two movements.

In the latter stages of his book York describes, largely uncritically, a wide variety of methodological approaches to the New Age and NRMs, from the standpoint of sociologists and church-sect theory. In the last pages of the text he establishes a methodology he finds usefully applicable to the phenomena of both the New Age and neo-Pagan Movements. This is Gerlach and Hine's concept of SPIN "Segmented Polycentric Integrated Network" (Gerlach and Hine, 1970 – see chapter 3 below). York, brilliantly, recognises the complementarity of this construct with Starhawk's description of the functions of pagan movements as "circular structures of immanence". Starhawk explains that:

When a group is alive and thriving, coalitions are constantly forming, shifting, deepening, re-forming. When there is a great deal of crossover among coalitions, they become the stitching that binds the group together as a whole. (Quoted in York, 1995: 327-8)

Finally, York cites Marilyn Ferguson's statement in *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, (1987) that "the Aquarian Conspiracy is, in effect, a SPIN of SPINs, a network of many networks aimed at social transformation". This concept, York claims, combined with a "church-denomination-cult-sect typology" reflects both the "reticulate polycephalous structure comprising

the holistic movement" and forms a "viable sociological tool" for study of the New Age and neo-Pagan Movements.

Again it is worth noting that even with such a differentiated and subtle tool of analysis, York may arrive at a structural definition which accurately represents the social and political structure of the New Age and neo-Pagan movements, but this does not address the issue of what the beliefs and practices of New Age spiritualities actually amount to.

The critique presented in this chapter clearly demonstrates the necessity of developing a hermeneutic appropriate to a study of New Age spiritualities. The accounts of the New Age offered by Parsons, Wallis and Anthony and Robbins do not reflect the actual morphology of New Age phenomena. The faults of their analyses, we have seen, are fundamentally flawed as to accuracy and utility. In part the limitations of their descriptions result from inappropriate methodology and method. Heelas and York offer more subtle descriptions of New Age phenomena but they also do not provide models of analysis for fully differentiated and detailed studies of New Age spiritualities. A more accurate account requires a novel approach: a hermeneutic that is sufficiently refined to reflect the multifaceted dimensions of the New Age.

1.5 TOWARDS A NEW DISCOURSE

In 1893, at The World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, there was great excitement at the prospect and dawning of a new age in the

study of religions. Joseph Kitagawa has described the sense of purpose felt at this meeting:

What interested many ardent supporters of the parliament was the religious and philosophical inquiry into the possibility of the unity of all religions, and not the scholarly, religio-scientific study of religions (1959: 40).

This project never met its target, for even by the 1930's the comparative study of religion was being challenged methodologically and theologically. Academically, the comparative method in Religious Studies has moved out of mainstream research methodologies. But the influence of these scholars' dreams persists. The realm of this discourse has shifted from universities to halls, houses, individual encounters with multiple religions and "folk" understandings of the unity of religions. Furthermore, the *mode* of this discourse has shifted from a project of unifying different historically based, geographically specific and culturally situated religious traditions, to an *ad hoc* appropriation and adaptation of diverse ideas to the modern world environment.

The similarity (if one need be found) between the New Age spiritualities' understanding and use of multiple religious ideas and that of early comparative approaches to the study of religions is the philosophical belief in essence. According to New Age beliefs there are essential recognisable truths to be found in all religions beneath the language of cultural specificity. New Age spiritualities conceive this as Aldous Huxley's "perennial philosophy", which necessarily exists as the expression of that core perennial spirit to be found within us all (Di Carlo,

1996: 93-5). The common thread linking the networks of the New Age spiritualities is the corollary belief that this philosophy teaches the rediscovery of the spirit. There may, however, be many different practical methods by which an individual might reach that goal. Bede Griffiths described just such a mode of thought in *The Marriage of East and West* (1986) in this way:

It is the purpose of every genuine religion to reveal this transcendent mystery and to teach the way to its attainment ... When we penetrate beyond the rational mind, we come upon a deeper self, a self that takes hold of our whole being, body and soul, and draws us into its infinite being. (1986: 169)

Griffiths illustrates here a crucial conflict in the worldview of New Age spiritualities and the worldview of many of those involved in the academic study of New Age. Griffiths assumes the possibility of going beyond rationality and is clearly privileging a spiritual conception of the self, while many academic descriptions and criticisms of such a worldview are firmly fixed within a rational and materialist framework, a point which, I hope, resonates with the critique of typological type approaches outlined above.

This discussion is not new, of course. Arnold Toynbee grappled with the issue in his excellent series of Gifford Lectures in 1952-3, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*. There he conceived "human nature" as reflecting the spiritual and "non-human nature" as the physical:

Human Nature will not account for the aspect of the Universe that mathematics and physics reveal; but then these will not account for the aspect that is revealed in Human Nature. There is no ground except caprice or prejudice for treating the mathematico-physical aspect of the Universe as being real in any fuller measure than the spiritual aspect is. The mathematico-physical

aspect, like the spiritual aspect, is a datum of human consciousness. Our view of the physical universe is no more objective than our view of ourselves. (Toynbee, 1956: 288)

If this is the case, how are we to "view" the phenomena of New Age spiritualities? Toynbee has no difficulty in isolating *his* discriminatory tools:

All the living religions are going to be put to a searching practical test. 'By their fruits ye shall know them'. The practical test of a religion, always and everywhere, is its success or failure in helping human souls to respond to the challenges of Suffering and Sin. (Toynbee, 1956: 296)

And his measurement for this category is that of the historian, time:

If we do not feel that we can afford to wait for Time to do its discriminating work, we are confessing to a lack of faith in the truth and value of the religion that happens to be ours. (Toynbee, 1956: 296)

This, it will be seen, is quite an opposing approach to the objective neutrality espoused by Paul Heelas. Toynbee is convinced of the value, in religious matters at least, of taking a position with regard to the material. Monica Sjöö, much more polemically, is also willing to take this approach. Is there any value in such an approach for Religious Studies? Does the hermeneutic of adopting a specific stance have a valid use in the study of New Age spiritualities?

As a first measure I propose considering the development of a new methodology and discourse which is sensitive and responsive to the *actual* nature of New Age spiritualities. This discourse should focus on the two related themes of "inclusivity" or plurality, and "involvement". The

necessity of formally stating an inclusive approach arises from the specific problems engendered both by the structures of New Age spiritualities and the truth claims made by those within the networks. The challenge for the student of religions is therefore methodological but also, prior to that, philosophical. One reason for this is that methodological clarity requires epistemological structure. Contemporary manifestations of spirituality challenge the accepted ontological and epistemological norms of modernity, which rely on scientific criteria of exclusivity and the assumption of the discrete nature of phenomena. A new epistemology, flexible enough to respond to New Age spiritualities, will necessarily include scientific criteria, but will equally enlarge the accepted fields of knowledge through the *a priori* acceptance of all worldviews. Notably, with regard to New Age spiritualities, worldviews which insist upon an underlying universal unity and those which conceive of cosmological explanations for events as pre-eminent.

Specifically this will involve questioning a number of basic epistemological assumptions such as causality, which Jung called "one of our most sacred dogmas". It will also lead to a consideration of alternatives to fixed modalities of thought. These alternatives may include, for example, synchronicity in place of causality; uncertainty and probability in place of facticity; holism in place of particularism, especially with regard to models of "persons" in medicine and psychology; and developing concepts of the role of humanity from a cosmic rather than simply mundane and biological perspective. The result will be an extended heterogeneity of knowledge, not, as critics of such a

methodology might fear, an amorphous homogeneity.

The second aspect of this new discourse has some grounding in postmodern critical theory. The critique I have given in this chapter can be simply restated: a structured and open reading of texts as well as study of religious practice and individuals' beliefs, involves conscious and unconscious presuppositions just as does the creation of typological constructs. The preliminary assumption of readers being able to achieve an etic (observer/objective) perspective is as inaccurate as the neutrality of observers in the study of religious practices. The more honest approach is therefore explicitly emic, just as much in reading as in the study of religious activity. This does not mean that the hermeneutic of the observer has no use, simply that such an approach, if it relies upon significantly different epistemological assumptions, will produce equally significant disparities in its conclusions.

There must be some compatibility between the method of study and the phenomenon studied. Therefore a quantitative analysis of New Age spiritualities will yield information on those areas that conform to such an analysis - a horizontal description. But failure to include a qualitative analysis will yield only a two-dimensional description at best. Furthermore, if the qualitative analysis also relied on a significantly different worldview, such a method would equally result in an unbalanced account of the phenomena studied. The worst case of such an approach would result in a description that does not represent to any great extent the self-description of those ostensibly the objects of the study.

The conclusion of this critique is that the most successful and accurate hermeneutic in the study of New Age spiritualities is one which is practically oriented to participation and qualitative approaches, rather than observing and quantitative approaches. More radically, it adopts some of the very challenging ideas of New Age spiritualities themselves in order to capture adequately the dynamic and manifold nature of the phenomena.

Finally, while many aspects of New Age thinking are historically derivative, the theoretical perspective I have described is *post*-postmodern. The ultimate meta-theory of post-structuralist critiques is that there is no final or correct understanding of reality. The relative status of basic ontological and epistemological theories is established by social and cultural norms, which are themselves dependent upon historical and geographical specificities.

But within New Age thinking there is a further, underlying cause for the development of theories, norms and indeed local specificities which is the inter-relation of all aspects of the whole with each other. In this view, paradigms (or worldviews) and paradigm shifts are the result of the multiple confluences of the mundane and the cosmic, a web-like form of interactions. In essence this is an epistemology that recognises the total interdependence of all minutiae of existence. So, the Zen Buddhist teacher characterises an aspect of New Age thinking, as well as Zen cosmology when she states: "When a mote of dust rises, the whole universe rises with it."

The consequences of the critique of typologies of the New Age offered in this chapter, and the suggestion of a new methodology, or at least the adoption of an involved hermeneutic, are two-fold. The first requirement is to make explicit the methodology and set of methods by which the New Age spiritualities may be more successfully studied. The second task is that of clarifying the field by a detailed study of elements that constitute the field. With new lenses it becomes possible to focus more accurately, and represent more usefully, some key features of the web of New Age spiritualities.



CHAPTER 2

BRINGING NEW AGE SPIRITUALITIES INTO FOCUS

No theory ever agrees with all the *facts* in its domain, yet it is not always the theory that is to blame. Facts are constituted by older ideologies, and a clash between facts and theories may be proof of progress. It is also a first step in our attempt to find the principles implicit in familiar observational notions. (Feyerabend, 1975: 57)

My aim is decidedly not to use the categories of cultural totalities (whether worldviews, ideal types, the particular spirit of an age) in order to impose on history, despite itself, the forms of structural analysis. (Foucault, 1972: 5)

Spirituality must encompass every dimension of human life. A responsible spirituality must be the expression of the whole woman. (Craighead, 1982: 78)

2.1 THEORETICAL SIGNPOSTS AND PARADIGMS

The conclusion of the last chapter posited a radical re-evaluation of the approach necessary to accurately comprehend the dynamism and diversity of New Age spiritualities. In brief, I found fault with the typologies of a number of sociological approaches in terms of practical and theoretical hermeneutics. The former because of insufficient and rigid models based on outmoded concepts of "religion"; the latter, because of the slow process of changing ideology - pre-postmodern theory is too deeply embedded in the historical record. That is, the history of descriptions of religion is actually an expression of the worldview of those who matched their theoretical presuppositions to the material they controlled in making these histories. Simply, old models

and methods worked within a particular worldview, which is now being challenged. Postmodern theories applied as a hermeneutic in the study of religiosity are of an emergent and tentative kind.

This negative critique of vestigial positivist preconceptions I considered in the light of some forward-looking developments within the field. There is an increasingly subtle understanding of the *construction* of descriptions of religious belief and practice. In the three fields of Anthropology, Sociology and Religious Studies more sensitive research methods are evolving. The key move is from a cumbersome observer-participant model to one that accurately reflects the data using nuanced qualitative/quantitative hermeneutics. Equally there are some practical models more specifically appropriate for research in the field of New Age spiritualities, such as the idea of SPIN, "systems theory" and the notion of the "web". This chapter will focus on these areas, hermeneutics and practical models. In essence, it is an attempt to mould some *general* aspects, of what amounts to a critique of some forms of western knowledge, into a *specific* framework and foundation for research into New Age spiritualities.

The sources for a comprehensive and responsive methodology must be manifold to achieve their embracing objective. Equally the methodology must be given a historical context before it can be applied to the data. (But such an image, of "application", is of course, theory-laden - it conveys the old duality of subject and object, a dichotomy that has been sufficiently philosophically discarded not to need further explanation). A

truly responsive methodology must adequately represent the data that it presumes to study. And it is this requirement which has led to the inclusion of both participatory and qualitative approaches in the study of religion. Yet the emphasis of many studies is still based on a theory of objectively describable phenomena. The form, status and presentation of knowledge for academic papers are still too often weighted towards the quantitative. Why is this so?

Knowledge itself is a cultural artefact, a product of history and susceptible to the predispositions of its present milieu. How we know, or can describe, our experience of the world is structured by this cultural artefact. Thus, in the study of religion also, the presentation of information in a given field is moulded by the prevalent discourse, which is constructed within a broader framework of what constitutes knowledge. "Certain" knowledge at this moment in history is largely empirical and dependent on the history of post-enlightenment, post-industrial society. Our descriptions of religious practice and belief reflect this background. They are predominantly empirical; they represent this history because they emerge from it, necessarily.

If knowledge and our descriptions are necessarily dependent on the past, how are we able to create new knowledge or reform imbalance in a field? Changing knowledge involves a self-reflective process. An initial response demands that we focus on what we mean by "knowledge". It is important to recognise the existence of many types of knowledge, working within many discourses. Then, it must be established which

discourses prevail in a field and how they function within that field. Finally, it must be recognised that discourses carry a certain power and influence in structuring the kinds of description that are acceptable and those that are not. The process of discovering the functional role and character of knowledge in a specific discourse can be likened to the process of psychological analysis. The objective of the Jungian analyst is to bring about a balanced individuated person. In this analysis the aim of unmasking the prevailing discourse leads to new knowledge and a new position of balance between acceptable and unacceptable forms of knowledge.

Manifestations of this process are evident in all fields currently revisiting the bases of their knowledge in the light of post-structural critiques. This is especially so in the historical perspective of a global, postmodern society. This chapter can be conceived within such a context. It represents a particle of the re-valuation and re-dedication of Religious Studies to its foundations - the study of religious expression. Phenomenological practice apart, such a review has been long overdue. Wilfred Cantwell Smith argued against the notional construction of "religions" in 1964. Peter Beyer in 1998 states:

Nonetheless, in spite of these inconsistencies and misgivings, the discipline in fact, for the most part, proceeds in practical terms as if religion were a reasonably clear category, as if there were definitely such entities as religions (or at least delineated traditions). (1998: 2)

The reason for the continued acceptance of this basic typology is akin to the general consensus of acceptance of the most rudimentary level of scientific empiricism; it manifestly works. But a historian will easily recognise that the notion of a "great chain of being" (Lovejoy, 1936) "worked", as also, before the Enlightenment, did the authority of the Church in the matter of controlling knowledge. The manner in which a tradition of knowledge works is a matter of cultural specificity. That all forms of knowledge have a temporal existence is, paradoxically, the most absolute statement we can make regarding the formation of knowledge.

The point of these introductory comments is to create a context for the methodological construction that will be elaborated below. The context is an attempt to formulate an accurate descriptive methodology for the New Age spiritualities and represents one strand in a general critique of western knowledge. I have adopted a number of sources for this dual purpose. They are powerful challenges to the main discourses of modernity. They are critical of many contemporary fundamental assumptions about how we know and see the world. Michel Foucault perhaps would have resisted being used as a new foundation for a model of relativist knowledge. Certainly he would have been concerned that this may be a foundation whereby New Age beliefs could be found room in the house of postmodern knowledge. By contrast, Thomas Kuhn sits more happily in the space created by relative discourses. A number of secular feminists, however, would be equally as wary as Foucault

about their inclusion in this thesis as providing a contiguous model of knowledge to that espoused by some networks of New Age spiritualities. Nevertheless, I have used their critiques, as to some extent academic insiders, to support the peripheral and outsider claims to knowledge taken by elements of New Age spiritualities. Out of context my appropriation of Foucault's ideas may seem like an abuse of scholarly integrity. Yet I conceive the magpie relocation's of others ideas a part of the scholarly project. Evolutionary adoption and adaptation are intrinsic to the process of changing knowledge and understanding.

2.2 POWER AND PARADIGMS

2.2.1 Foucault's Critique of Discourse

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault develops in detail his conception of a "history of ideas". He goes on to state the "great many points of divergence" between this method and his own "Archaeology" (Foucault, 1972: 136-140). This is a key section in the text, not least because it offers with rare clarity Foucault's definition of the value and aims of his archaeology. It is sufficient to note here that Foucault isolates four differences of principle, "they concern the attribution of innovation, the analysis of contradictions, comparative descriptions, and the mapping of transformations" (Foucault, 1972: 138). Foucault denies any final reading from history or indeed any discourse. He claims only to "reveal" discourses, provide a "differential analysis" of discourses, deny

the possibility of oeuvres, and dissolve the idea of unity or an "author". All of which is contrary to my objectives of accurately representing a set of phenomena, of charting a "new domain" Instead I am the "shady philosopher" whom Foucault characterises as the historian of ideas. Why then, does Foucault's thinking entrance me? Why, it is relevant to ask, was Foucault so careful to distance himself from this historian of ideas? Simply, because he draws his lines in the same way as a historian of ideas. Yet he is too subtle and rigorous to make the summative type of judgements of the historian of ideas. Indeed he is wary and careful to distance himself from any such trace.

And now a suspicion occurs to me. I have behaved as if I were discovering a new domain, as if, in order to chart it, I needed new measurements and guidelines. But, in fact, was I not all the time in that very space that has long been known as 'the history of ideas'? ... I cannot be satisfied until I have cut myself off from 'the history of ideas.' (Foucault, 1972: 136)

Despite his disclaimers Foucault has provided tools which are easily appropriated by the historian of ideas. These tools are worth briefly expanding in terms of Foucault's various projects, before applying them to the study of religions and New Age spiritualities.

In distinguishing Foucault's thought from that of Noam Chomsky, Paul Rabinow points to a significant objective of Foucault's, which is an implicit facet of all Foucault's critiques. "Foucault's aim is to understand the plurality of roles that reason, for example, has taken as a social practice in our civilisation". For Foucault this is a theme that became a "consistent imperative ... to discover the relations of specific scientific

disciplines and particular social practices" (Rabinow, 1984: 4-5). That there is a relation of social practice to reason, or knowledge, is a grounding principle of Foucault's approach. The correlative principle in his thinking is that the mode of this relationship is that of power.

Foucault succinctly describes the relation thus:

It is a question of what governs statements, and the way in which they govern each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable, and hence capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures. ("Truth and Power", quoted in Rabinow, ed., 1984: 54)

And, contrary to much structuralist and indeed post-structuralist thinking, he avoids linguistic metaphor and hermeneutic, "one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language and signs, but to that of war and battle ... relations of power not relations of meaning" ("Truth and Power", quoted in Rabinow, ed., 1984: 56).

Foucault's method of genealogy and archaeology is carefully precise in avoiding any trace of "genesis, continuity, totalisation" (Foucault, 1972: 138). He does not make any statements that could be construed as final and summative, except that power is the underlying factor in discourse construction. He is equally deliberate in prising open discontinuities, while establishing the heterogeneity of sources.¹

¹ Re: genealogy, Foucault states, in "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History", "The search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary ... it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself." (Quoted in Rabinow, ed., 1984: 82)

A further area of Foucault's method relevant to this field is his "genealogy of the modern subject". In his analysis of modernity, which he suggests should be envisaged "as an attitude rather than a period of history", Foucault describes the ethos of the present as "a permanent critique of our historical era", based on modernity being "the will to 'heroize' the present" ("What is Enlightenment?" quoted in Rabinow, ed., 1984: 39-42). This analysis strongly parallels the notion of New Age spiritualities as Self-religions and as facets of this self-referential new "attitude" of modernity.

The preface to *The History of Sexuality: Volume II* provides a worthwhile simile to the method that might be applied in a study of New Age spiritualities specifically and Religious Studies in a more general form. Here Foucault delineates an approach to "a historically singular form of experience", and it is clear from the excerpt below that the method concentrates on the outer boundaries, the "accidents" and "minor deviations", which are the hallmark of Foucault's critical methodology:

To treat sexuality as the correlation of a domain of knowledge, a type of normativity and a mode of relation to the self; it means trying to decipher how, in Western societies, a complex experience is constituted from and around certain forms of behaviour: an experience which conjoins a field of study (with its own concepts, theories, diverse disciplines) a collection of rules (which differentiate the permissible from the forbidden, actual from monstrous, normal from pathological, what is decent from what is not etc.) a mode of relation between the individual and himself (which enables him

to recognise himself as a sexual object amid others).
(Foucault in Rabinow, ed., 1984: 333-4).²

A simple insertion of 'spirituality' or 'religiosity' for 'sexuality' reveals the applicability of this statement as a method of research. If New Age spiritualities are the [plural] "form of experience" then the correlate "field of study" is Religious Studies. A study of New Age spiritualities involves, therefore, an analysis of the structures that constitute this discourse of Religious Studies. It is possible to posit the historical formation of the "rules" and "concepts" of this discourse between the two structures of Religious institutions and scientific empirical knowledge. "religious institutions" refers to the historical development of the study of religion and its especially Christian traditions: from the medieval universities and academies funded and directed under Church authority to the theological hegemony of Christian doctrine and dogma in debates on religion even to the middle of the twentieth century.³ "Scientific empirical knowledge" refers to post-enlightenment Western knowledge with its privileged conception of an empirical world: from the Royal Society and Francis Bacon to Key Stage Three science in a modern secondary school. Hence the specific concepts, theories and typologies (the very way in which we frame our descriptions), including such constructions as

² It is a minor, but interesting point, that Foucault refers to self-recognition only from a male perspective here, when elsewhere he describes "subjectification" as the "way a human being turns him - or herself into a subject" (quoted in Rabinow, ed., 1984: 11).

³ This might be conceived to include a broader field than simply the Christian tradition, but it remains hegemonic nevertheless, in the form of "World Religions", being those which suit the classification of religion in its traditional guise - cf Beyer, 1998.

New Age spiritualities, must be "unmasked" as parts of the genealogy of these two structures.

If we proceed further with this analysis, along the lines Foucault sets out, it would be necessary to question the *function* of such concepts. One function is that the term "New Age" is a simplistic category for referring to diverse beliefs and practices. However, this is an unrepresentative definition when surveys show that those ostensibly involved in New Age activities explicitly reject the label. The effect is to socially marginalise those who are unrepresented. Further unmasking would investigate whose interests such terminology serves. Again, immediate consideration suggests the peripheralisation of the knowledge and ideas proposed by many New Age philosophies by the twin structures of power within this discourse. The purpose of peripheralisation lies in the relation of power and knowledge - it is a relationship "red in tooth and claw". Neither of the genealogies, religious institutions nor scientific knowledge are willing to give up their control of knowledge of the world, of spirit and matter.

This style of analysis results in conspiratorial solutions. Foucault avoids such simplistic conclusions by refusing either to create a meta-theory or to arrive at final statements on any given issue. Yet this methodology would neither accurately represent nor do justice to a study of New Age spiritualities. It merely describes the context, or discourse, in which New Age spiritualities find themselves.

We must return to the theme that a study of a given phenomenon must represent the ostensible object of the study as it would itself. Therefore, just as most practices and theories espoused by those within the New Age assume an absolute and final position (for example, the "Universal Force" - Rose, 1996: 186) so, reflexively, a methodology designed to accurately represent and respond to this belief could posit an absolute statement regarding its ability to discover absolute foundations, even while recognising the practical impossibility of a fully comprehensive survey. Obviously this approach is not a necessary corollary of adopting Foucault's methodology and applying it to a study of New Age spiritualities. It is my view though, that Foucault's main philosophical *weakness* is that his explicit search for fractures and "perpetual disintegration" implicitly figures the binary opposite, not fractures but unity. For Foucault this is the silent "other" which he fails to recognise. Thus, a more accurate methodology (and a project thoroughly un-Foucauldian) uses the method of Foucault to unmask the concepts of knowledge and their functional use, but then proceeds to a new construction, a new view of New Age spiritualities and one which emanates from the field itself.

A specific example of this approach is to consider the idea of New Age spiritualities as "Self-Religions". This particular description emerges in the history of studies of the New Age Movement in the work of Paul Heelas (1982, cf chapter 1: 15). His preliminary formulation of the idea arose out of his own sociological background and this aspect is clearly

emphasised in Heelas's work. He develops the notion that these Self-religions, arising initially in California, are predominantly social in their construction, and that they function as a means of "socialising the self" (the title of Heelas's 1982 paper is "Californian Self-Religions and Socialising the Subjective"). He states his "basic argument - *that the self-religions have developed techniques which locate or construe the subjective in such a fashion as to make this realm predictable, secure, liveable and, in a nutshell, social*" (Heelas's emphasis, 1982: 70). Heelas goes on to assert that, "self-religions stabilise, organise, amplify and control the subjective". Yet by failing to analyse the "subjective" to any degree Heelas is simply begging the question: what is the constitution of the subject? Of course, Heelas is quite correct to highlight the idea of the self, or subject, as crucially significant in the New Age Movement. It is perhaps the foremost trope in new religions, especially as it refers to the role of psychology in the historical development of New Age philosophies. Indeed, the development of the "higher self" is an explicit aim within the New Age Movement (Rose, 1996: 80ff). But this concept is more than a psychological and social key. To discover the wider meaning and function of the notion of self it needs to be treated as a cultural and historical artefact - not only in terms of its political and economic aspects, but as it functions in the construction of western knowledge. And it is this last aspect that will yield the most fruitful results.

In an interview with Foucault in 1983, shortly before his death, Paul Rabinow and Herbert Dreyfus questioned Foucault about whether there is any similarity between the Greek concern with the self and our modern "self-absorption". Foucault's response explicitly refers to the "Californian cult of the self", which he defines in terms of the psychoanalytic revelation of the "true self". He defines this notion of the self, which he considers to be "diametrically opposed" to the *techne* of the Greeks in making of their selves works of art. He explains:

What happened in between is precisely an overturning of the classical culture of the self. This took place when Christianity substituted the idea of a self which one had to renounce, because clinging to the self was opposed to God's will, for the idea of a self which had to be created as a work of art. (Foucault in Rabinow, ed., 1984: 362)

This concept of the self must be analysed from within the field of New Age spiritualities and as a historical concept functioning within a broader epistemological discourse.

Hence, an application of Foucault's analysis elucidates valuable insights into the realm of hermeneutics in the study of New Age spiritualities. He has marked a path by which we must reconsider the basic nomenclature of our subject. Furthermore, he has delineated in his analysis of "techniques of the self" a pertinent approach to the study of the Self in the Self-religions that are a part of the set of practices and beliefs comprised by New Age spiritualities.

However, to adopt and apply Foucault's theories will result, in my opinion, in a conclusion analogous to that of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. His propositions are steps on a ladder that must be thrown away after use. We "must transcend these propositions" (this method of Foucault's) to "see the world aright" (Wittgenstein, 1921: 6.54).⁴ One might use a further Wittgensteinian image that a frame has been drawn around the picture, but the picture itself has been left unexpressed. Thus, we return again to the necessity for the voices of those espousing New Age spiritualities to describe at least the vocal form of this picture.⁵ Yet both Foucault and Wittgenstein avoided "filling in" this particular space, lest their work become another system of closure.⁶

2.2.2 Kuhn's Paradigm Shifts

It is possible to suggest a *theoretical* perspective that will result in a study which, to extend the metaphor, paints an accurate picture. This is a complex and a dangerous task, where one has to avoid the banal representationalism of historicism, and an abstraction that is incommensurate with the actual beliefs and practices of New Age spiritualities. Such a theory would presuppose that there is an end to

⁴ This famous conclusion to the *Tractatus* is preceded by the statement that, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words" (6.522) and concluded by "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence"(7).

⁵ The "techniques" of this expression, of hearing the voices of the subjects of our study will be examined in relation, and in concert with, feminism as a critique, and feminist spirituality as a phenomenon (see below).

⁶ In the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) Wittgenstein contradicts this position - an analogy with this paper would be that he becomes more "involved" and takes a more emic stance.

genealogy, archaeology and the practice of unmasking; that beneath relative and culturally specific forms there exists an absolute, recognisable process. This process has been described by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970, second edition) in terms of "paradigms". Reduced to simplicity, this process may be explained as the development of paradigms, their acculturation and acceptance within a community, then their overthrow or "paradigm shift" to a new consensus (paradigm). Kuhn's application of this theory to scientific knowledge caused immediate furore within the scientific community, but it is the epistemological resonance and consequent broader applications which are relevant in the study of religions generally, and New Age spiritualities especially.

The simplicity of the dialectical structure of Kuhn's model belies the sophisticated detail of discourse analysis necessary to express the nature of a paradigm. As a historical meta-theory it has something of the grand vision of Hegel's dialectic of the progress of *Geist*, Marx's political materialist inversion of that process, or other meta-historical perspectives such as Spengler's or Toynbee's analyses of civilisations. The notion of a paradigm is perhaps best compared with the structuralist conception of discourse. The theory recognises a variety of paradigms (discourses) relevant to specific disciplines and requiring specialist skills to reveal their many facets. Yet there are more general paradigms, political, ethical, even epistemological and ontological, which provide the

basic characteristics, the foundations, of these specific paradigms.⁷ If the theory and methodology of paradigms and paradigm shifts were applied to a study of New Age spiritualities, it would be possible to fill out the picture left blank by merely applying Foucault's critical method.

For, Foucault has only helped us to reveal the functions and structure of our present concept of New Age spiritualities within the present paradigm of Religious Studies. Kuhn, however, has provided a model by which we might predict change within a paradigm shift and even prefigure a new paradigm. Kuhn's notion of paradigm, filled out by descriptions of those within New Age spiritualities, gives us the palette by which we might represent the beliefs of New Age spiritualities most accurately. The model of an emergent paradigm does not require us to become a-historical, to presume a prescience beyond our cultural specificity. It does, however, assume that any description of a new paradigm must be to some degree hypothetical and tentative, but also visionary, which is (to conclude the metaphor) the realm of the artist-painter.

To illustrate this point further it is useful to consider one of the foremost voices adapted and adopted by many New Age spiritualities, Carl Jung. In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933),⁸ Jung states that "we are at

⁷ This description, it should be clear, reflects the description of knowledge as a cultural artefact outlined in the Introduction to this chapter.

⁸ Published in 1933, somewhat in response to the increasingly secularist impulse within academia, and especially in implicit response to Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), these views considerably pre-date either Kuhn's notion of paradigms or the label of a "New Age".

the threshold of a new spiritual epoch" (1933: 250). He is aware of the partial foundations of his claim and of the tendentious value of psychology as a science (and therefore how his claim will be viewed in terms of true or certain knowledge by a rigorously empiricist scientific discourse). Nevertheless, he suggests the similitude of the Christianisation of the Roman Empire that pre-figures the concept of a major paradigm shift very accurately:

the facts I have cited are wholly irrelevant contingencies in the eyes of many millions of Westerners, and seem only regrettable errors to a large number of educated persons. But I may ask: What did a cultivated Roman think of Christianity when he saw it spreading among the people of the lowest classes? (1933: 252)

Obviously, history is equally littered with prophetic "errors" and "irrelevant contingencies", at least in terms of the creation of a paradigm. Few intellectual or spiritual movements have brought about a paradigm shift of consequence, though such is often entailed in their radical visions. In the light of failed visions one might consider the political utopianism of the Levellers, or Robert Owen's dreams of paternalist factory communities, such as his own in New Lanarkshire. Equally one might recognise the liberal communism which became the "god that failed" for intellectuals such as Arthur Koestler in the 1930's, or the pacifist visions developed in Haight-Ashbury in the 1960's. All were proposing a new paradigm that never fully emerged. But the last example given could be signified as a point of departure for the new paradigm espoused by the New Age spiritualities. Indeed, each of the

other examples has some relevance as a strand in the particular history of the construction of the "self", and a new concept of community in post-industrial society,⁹ and are therefore also of relevance for the paradigm shift implied by a "New" Age. Analysis of paradigms will reveal sometimes tenuous, but nevertheless significant roots. However, none of these examples is comparable to the shift from a pagan to a Christian Roman Empire, and it is this level of paradigm shift that is envisioned by many New Age spiritualities and philosophies.

For those adhering to New Age spiritualities the perceived over-arching paradigm of knowledge and experience is that of scientific empiricism, (the general legacy of Enlightenment rationality). Ironically perhaps, the focus of the perceived paradigm shift is also emerging from within that legacy, from scientists and science itself. The language of a new science is gaining currency within the broader field of New Age spiritualities (cf Di Carlo, 1996, Ferguson, 1980, chapter 6, *Resurgence* 1998, 186: 26-7 and 187: 6-12). The voices of scientists are especially privileged within New Age spiritualities discourse, just as they are in empiricist descriptions of the natural world. The popularity of certain scientific insights within the discourse of the New Age spiritualities is, for many within the New Age, indicative of a paradigm shift from a reductive materialist worldview to a holistic spiritual worldview.

⁹ Obviously the levellers were pre-industrial, but it is the nature of history that ideas resonate beyond their cultural specificity.

Examples of these popular scientific insights range from Niels Bohr's epithetic recognition of Kuhn's theory, "Science advances funeral by funeral", to the metaphysical speculations of other quantum physicists such as David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980). Equally significant are James Lovelock's *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979), and more popular renditions of these ideas, such as Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1976) or *The Web of Life* (1996). It should be noted that a number of commentators consider these works "populist" and simply inaccurate (MacRobert, 1988; Seckel, 1988; Lucas, 1996). The voices of Capra *et al* resound in constructions and predictions of a new paradigm. But they are not the sole contributors to this new worldview; there are diverse expressions of a new paradigm from educationalists and economists to healers, historians and philosophers (Di Carlo, 1996) - evidence for those within the New Age of the depth and imminence of the paradigm shift.

Again, it is not the place here to provide great detail about the variety of descriptions, and surprising unity of understanding of the key features of the new paradigm (or, as it is frequently described, "worldview"). My point is simply to construct an accurately representative hermeneutic which recognises the applicability of the method and theory of paradigm shifts in describing the phenomena of New Age spiritualities - especially as it reflects an idea of considerable currency within the New Age spiritualities themselves.

2.3 FEMINISM: A METHOD OF INVOLVEMENT

There are two crucial ways in which feminism is comparable to the method of study of New Age spiritualities proposed in this thesis. First, as a critical method, it has laid out some of the boundaries which are equally appropriate for a study of New Age spiritualities; second, as a field, feminist enquiry includes, ever increasingly, women's spirituality, an area which pertains especially to the field of New Age spiritualities. The notion of feminism as a (developing) critical practice and a (developing) knowledge resonates with New Age spiritualities as a discourse that critiques one worldview and expands another. In this somewhat reified view of feminism it can be seen as a method of study that creates the object of its study. It uncovers a field of research, and unmaskers reasons for the oversight of this field.

Moreover, such Foucauldian unmasking is just one of the comparable tools used in the feminist project which has categorically "discovered" patriarchy. "Feminist critics have unmasked the ideological foundations of much of our knowledge and institutions, including the practice of religion and spirituality" (King, 1993: 16). Equally, the "rules" and "boundaries" of acceptable knowledge and behaviour have been shown by feminism to be historically conditioned by social constructions, under the aegis of the meta-paradigm of patriarchy. In the process of uncovering the entwinings of this power with the multiplicity of human activities, feminism has developed (from Paul Ricoeur) a corollary "hermeneutic of suspicion". The claim made here is that New Age

spiritualities closely parallel feminism to this extent: they are a subject for study and the best method to carry out this study emerges from the field itself.

In this conception of feminism, it is possible to divide the practice of feminism into two parts: the negative critique of existing social forms, and the positive creation of a vision of future harmony.¹⁰ While the areas covered by the "negative critique" and future "vision" are extensive, for relevance I will concentrate solely on the feminist study of women's spirituality, or spiritual feminism.

In the introduction to *The Feminist Mystic: And Other Essays on Women and Spirituality* (1982), Mary Giles makes a claim which mirrors the historical moment that also led to the proliferation of much New Age thinking:

We are at present, suspicious of the past, uncertain of the future. We are the women of solitude, being taught the art of living in and through the Spirit, and it is not easy.

It is not easy precisely because the assured voices of religion and social institutions and traditions which we believe instructed women in the past seem still. What we hear is debate. (Giles, 1982: 1)

The debate is that of postmodernity, the decline of institutional authority and relativisation of knowledge in conflict with juridical and scientific truth. In religion the debate ranges across the challenge of pluralism, inter-faith dialogue and multi-faith, multi-ethnic society in conflict with the

absolutes of the, especially monist, individual religious traditions. For women, this debate has been magnified, but at the same time brought to a focus, by the conflict between accepting traditional gender roles, the consequent continued passive playing out of an unrecognised, silent "other", and re-defining women's roles, which necessarily involves active challenge, whether or not that role is the final objective. The response of feminists to this debate, even in ascribing to the method and self-description as a "feminist", has been to create, to weave, a new vision of women's spirituality (cf Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow eds. *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, 1989). This creative action is again mirrored by New Age spiritualities in their attempts to frame a new paradigm.

The warp and weft of this weaving involve four core aspects; a structured critique of past and present religious practices (Daly, 1985; Christ and Plaskow eds. 1979, 1989; King, 1993; Spretnak, ed., 1982); a historical recovery and appropriation of belief, practice and human exemplars for a feminist spirituality (Giles, 1982; King, 1993; Ochs, 1983); the continued development and application of a methodology which reflects women's interests, knowledge and biological skills - I am referring particularly to "mothering" (Ochs) and menstruation (Raphael), (Ochs, 1983; Raphael, 1996; Ruether, 1992); and an elaboration of a new "mystical feminism" or "feminist spirituality" (Anderson and Hopkins,

¹⁰ Such a generalised statement obviously demands subtler definition, but the words have been carefully chosen and I hope the qualifications given below will serve to support rather than render the assertion meaningless.

1991; Garcia and Maitland, 1983; King, 1993).¹¹ I shall briefly proceed to a more detailed explanation of these four areas while making explicit the parallel relations of this specifically feminist reading of spirituality with the more inclusive, broad scope of New Age spiritualities. I refer to feminist spirituality as a phenomenon in the singular for the sake of ease of expression, while I recognise there are various feminist spiritualities, but their plurality is not damaged here (I believe).

2.3.1 Critique of Past and Present Religious Practices

The most severe criticism of a religious tradition must be simply to leave it. This was the action taken by Meinrad Craighead. After fourteen years as a nun in an English Benedictine monastery she left, dissatisfied with an exclusively androgynous theology. But, typically for feminist criticisms of traditional religions, she did not reject the whole Christian tradition. Rather she adapted and developed her Christianity to a post-patriarchal worship, with God as mother. In "Immanent Mother" (1982), Craighead establishes the value of spirituality as an aspect of the old tradition, but promotes it as the essential feature of her new practice. She bases this re-vision of an old model on personal experience. In the androcentric tradition at the monastery she had always felt a part of her own religiosity was silent, or at least unexpressed to the wider community of Benedictines. Thus, she conceived a more inclusive theology, one that more truthfully represented the area of silence, the feminine, maternal

¹¹ Citations of relevant texts here should be considered as *readings* rather than a general survey of the literature.

face of God. Almost as a moral imperative, she states "Spirituality must encompass every dimension of human life. A responsible spirituality must be the expression of the whole woman." (Craighead, 1982: 78)

Craighead's personal journey is representative of much feminist criticism; it is at once a rational and systematic critique of the patriarchal structures of traditional religion, as well as an expressive individual account of personal experience and understanding. This second aspect is one of the most vital contributions of feminism to academic studies. Feminism has made it possible and acceptable to discuss fields overlain by a history of dissociated male gravitas, in a manner that is involved, and where personal emotional response is allowed a voice. Ursula King prefaces the second edition of *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise* (1993) with a defining statement of this approach (at least, in as much as this is the style of discourse she adopts for this particular text):

This book is not primarily an academic exercise looking at contemporary feminism from an interested but detached point of view. On the contrary, its approach is based on a positive identification with the experience of contemporary women, much of which is also my experience. It explores and engages in dialogue with diverse feminist voices in a sympathetic and critical way. The feminist vision appeals as much to *imagination* and feeling as to the mind. Consequently, this book was written with both my head and my heart. (King, 1993: xii)¹²

¹² Carol Ochs makes a similar criticism of the male western tradition, dependent on reason, and the need for a feminist spirituality that is more balanced and "fully human" - "We need to recognise that to be human is to be capable both of reason and of emotional engagement" (Ochs, 1983: 5).

Such involvement is a central methodological theme proposed in this thesis. The qualitative and participatory aspects of a practical hermeneutic, which should be the basis of any fieldwork that is representative and accurate, depends upon the involvement of the scholar. There is a role both for the testimonies of subjects representing the phenomena, and for the researcher. While the former may be conceived as the ostensible "object" of a study, feminism, post-structuralism and indeed New Age spiritualities assert a significance and value in the co-expression of the latter. An example of this form of argument may, again, be found in King (an argument which is equally relevant as part of the broader critique of traditional models of spirituality *and* indicative of the affirmation, or vision, of a new spirituality).

The feminist critique of specific religious ideas and practices is becoming sharper ... as I and *many* others see it, at the heart of feminism is a spiritual struggle and a new experience which challenges much of traditional spirituality itself. More and more women are coming forth to speak about their religious life and about the understanding of spirituality from a feminist perspective. (1993: 56)

New Age spiritualities function in a similar manner to this aspect of feminism - as a critique of tradition and testimony of the individual subject.¹³

¹³ Unfortunately, there is no comparable "-ism" to make a satisfactory reference to this mode of New Age spiritualities. For one can be a "feminist" or practise "feminism", yet if one were to describe oneself as "spiritualist" or practising "spiritualism", these designations refer to a specific movement, with roots in the nineteenth century and Andrew Jackson Davies' trance-channeling. (To complicate things further, spiritualism and channelling form one sub-set within the broad New Age Movement.) Nevertheless, the appropriation of, for example, the notion of paradigms into the worldview of New Age spiritualities does constitute a structured critique in much the same way as criticism of patriarchy is a constituent of feminism.

2.3.2 Recovery of Women's Spirituality

The second aspect of the feminist project, to rediscover, appropriate and valorise past formulations of spirituality again has marked similarities to New Age spiritualities. Early works on feminist spirituality, such as Mary Giles's *The Feminist Mystic* (1982), have made explicit this connection. Giles exhorted her readers to follow the paths of medieval Christian women mystics such as Teresa of Avila or Catherine of Siena, "like the feminist mystic, we strive to be uniquely ourselves" (Giles, 1982: 3). Carol Ochs has attempted to uncover genuinely feminist role models in the Old Testament in Hagar and Leah, rather than "the role models men have offered us" in the forms of Deborah, Judith and Esther (Ochs, 1983: 33ff). There are also many women re-establishing and recovering pagan Goddess traditions, from ecofeminist theologies such as that of Rosemary Radford Ruether in *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (1992) and theologies such as that of Melissa Raphael, to the witchcraft of Starhawk and the Great Cosmic Mother of Monica Sjöö. The realms of acceptable spiritual practices and beliefs are expanding in both feminism and New Age spiritualities. Equally, the co-creativity of the self in constructing myth and spirituality, which is no longer dependent upon fixed historical formulations, has a comparable phenomenology in spiritual feminism and New Age spiritualities.

2.3.3 A Feminist Methodology

The third area of feminist spirituality, the continued development of a methodology representative of women's interests knowledge and skills, may be considered as a further strand of the critique of western knowledge. This claim of special "women's interests, knowledge and skills" seems, at first, unequivocally essentialist. Yet if we consider the gender roles of women as socially and historically constructed, balanced with certain biological sex differences (focusing on women's unique role in conception, pregnancy and birth), the absolutist position is somewhat tempered. But it is significant that historical gender roles have become in feminism the leverage for a critique both of who controls (power) and how control is maintained (knowledge). The biological apartheid of the Royal Society existed not only in its male only membership, but also in its method and focal interests. Feminism as a general movement seeks to uncover both aspects, while feminist spirituality elucidates the specific limitations of patriarchal knowledge in religion. Moreover, in expressing limitations, feminist spirituality seeks to announce a new construction.¹⁴ The new view is a response to both history and biology.

Carol Ochs chooses "mothering" as the "paradigmatic example" of women's contribution to a new spirituality. She asserts that historical, traditional ideas about spirituality have concentrated on ascetic and

¹⁴ This statement should be considered in the light of my earlier appropriation of Foucault: the boundaries and liminality of certain discourses are made explicit (Foucault's project ends here); but a new formulation emerges which is not logically necessary, but in feminism is vital, from an ethical, practical, fully human perspective.

otherworldly aspects. But feminism does not deny the flesh. One may add that it was men and patriarchy that created and enforced menstrual social taboos - such viscerality is an essential feature of women's experience. Feminist spirituality for Ochs is a "spirituality of this world" with "mothering as a context". She states, "the practice of mothering itself affirms this world and militates against other-worldliness" (Ochs, 1983: 45). A point that is made more explicitly by Raphael who writes, "certainly spiritual feminism is a productive activism in which female divine energies are expressed in biological and cultural generativity. A nine-month pregnancy requires about 800,000 calories and further calories to produce breast-milk; female sacral energies are not just a religious abstraction or metaphor - they actually burn food" (Raphael, 1996: 130).

Ochs further frames her new vision using Kant's critique of the categories of knowledge. She shows how Kant's claim that we cannot "know" reality in a pure sense (because our knowledge is filtered by our conceptions - especially time and quantity, or space) leads to the view that "a different sense of knowledge is needed". Such knowledge may be found in the category of knowing as "love". An example of this knowing comes in a mother's (or father's) relationship with an infant, whose own love is a pre-literate knowledge (Ochs, 1983: 52ff). Women's specific contribution to a new spirituality, Ochs affirms, comes in the form of these types of knowledge, especially "love, work and the communal life". This is perhaps a rather conservative, "worldly" end to her critique,

especially when one compares the mundane knowledge of work and community with the vibrancy of knowledge claimed within the New Age spiritualities.

2.3.4 Creative New Visions

The final feature of feminist spirituality, the creation of a new spirituality, is in many women's experience chronologically prior. Personal experience and self-reflection create the circumstances of a new understanding of spirituality. Intellectual critiques are secondary. The new spirituality is experienced foremost, often concurrently with the creation of intellectual frameworks, and is the subjective conclusion of feminist spirituality. Such pre-eminence of experience affects methodology and the presentation of ideas. Objective theologies and traditions are subsumed under the personal quest and the desire to express individual experiences within new frameworks of knowledge. Herein lies the similarity with historical expressions of mysticism, feminist spirituality and New Age spiritualities. The personal experience of God, Higher Self or spirit is the substance of spirituality, and is the light that defines the outlines of the substance. It is, therefore, both ontology and epistemology. This also is the key to the methodology of involvement; feminist spirituality and New Age spiritualities privilege personal knowledge sufficiently for that voice to be heard against the often overwhelming boom of traditional paradigms of knowledge.

It is not surprising that the image throughout Sherry Anderson and Patricia Hopkins' book, *The Feminine Face of God: the Unfolding of the Sacred in Women* (1992), is of a garden. Nurturing and care, we have already seen, are significant facets of the kind of knowledge and expressions of religiosity representative of much feminist spirituality. Growth is also a paradigm-image in many women's spiritualities. But the frequent corollary metaphor of a "journey" with beginning and end, a linear progress, has been problematised by some feminists as indicative of patriarchal thought forms. "The journey metaphor in traditional Western Spirituality conflicts with women's view of spirituality because inherent in the metaphor is the notion of a goal. Women's experience in mothering places value in the process, not in the final goal" (Ochs 1983: 138). Ochs' view is supported by the description of spiritual growth given in Anderson and Hopkins:

To embody the sacred so deeply that it flows into all our relationships - this, the women say, is where we are going now. It is where we need to go. And, not incidentally, it is where we have come from. (1992: 227)

The vision is harmonious, being in the world (involvement) and fulfilling the demands of the "other", the spirit (which is what Heidegger meant by "the presence of the present", da-sein, "being in the light of Being"). This vision incorporates women's experience on a personal and particular level with a general human experience. It is a new form of knowledge and a new position of balance.

A crucial aspect of this new balance consists in the relationship between the individual "self" and communal responsibility. In chapter 1 I briefly considered Paul Heelas' rubric of "Self-religions" as an unsophisticated, though important, notion of New Age religions socialising the self. In feminist spirituality, the concept of the role of the self is wider than Heelas' understanding and presents a truer, more accurate reading of the idea of the self in New Age spiritualities. King refers to the contemporary women's movement giving "expression to women's active determination to shape their own 'self' and the world around them" and adds that, "this process of finding a sense of self does not only occur at the personal level. It is happening at the social level to women as a group, in our society and many other societies around the globe" (King, 1993: 1-2). For her, and many feminists, "feminist spirituality is not only linked to a personal search for meaning and greater inwardness, but is often closely connected with the acceptance of social responsibility and political activism" (King, 1993: 116).

This is the inverse of Heelas notion of religions that socialise the self; rather it is the new idea of a spiritual self that comes to the social with a new vision of community. It is this understanding which informs Anderson and Hopkins in their final chapter, "Being the Sacred Garden",

This knowledge, concrete and particular, brings us all to the truth once perceived only by mystics, shamans and saints: that we are all connected. We know that we, who did not weave the web of life, who are merely a strand in it, can destroy it. We know, as Chief Seattle said over a hundred years ago, that whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. (1992: 226)

The idea of a "web" is an old metaphor. Yet it has contemporary resonances as a model for how we conceive the world, and experience it. Equally it has apt applications as a model for the study of New Age spiritualities. The task of the next chapter is to draw out this model, to avoid the pitfalls of the descriptions criticised in chapter 1 and to include the insights elucidated in both this and the former chapter. The focus of this task is to develop an approach which is "involved" in its method and subject, and to provide a model which is "accurate" and "useful" in that it reflects the dynamic form of its ostensible object and represents the voices, beliefs and practices of those whom it seeks to describe. Furthermore, if the model of the web is to fulfil its design criteria, it should equally clarify in empirical research the notion and role of the self within the community of the New Age spiritualities and the wider world.

PART II

METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: THE WEB AS MODEL

All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system ... The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1969: 105)

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Clifford Geertz, 1973: 5)

We believe that God is speaking in this moment. The divine language may not be the language of our traditions and assumptions, but a new language altogether. (Duncan Ferguson, 1993: x)

3.1. THE LANGUAGE OF THE WEB

The models that we bring to our experience prefigure how we experience the world. This basic tenet has profound implications for the researcher. An explicitly empirical piece of research requires considerable sensitivity in the light of such an observation. The most extreme example of researchers paying heed to this continuous quandary (if by "extreme" we mean time, energy and financial resources) can be found in particle physics research. George Johnson expresses the essence of the problem in this way:

As we go from electrons to positrons to neutrinos to quarks, and from gas-filled discharge tubes to cloud chambers to accelerators shooting beams at detectors so elaborate that they are among the most complex,

delicate devices ever made - it becomes harder to be sure that experimenters are simply observing what the theorists predict. There is a wide gulf between the beholder and the beheld, consisting not only of millions of dollars worth of detecting equipment but of the complex of theories with which the experiment is designed, its results interpreted. (Johnson, 1995: 55)

At the quantum level of research there are peculiar problems, which require a "complex of theories". But even at the macro level of human experience and interaction, there are specific problems of interpretation, which require sets of theories to comprehend them. Underlying the scientific project which led to particle physics is the epistemological assumption of a directly observable world and that the universe is comprehensible to the human mind. The research, in this area of science at least, has refracted back onto its theoretical presuppositions, to question the interpretative role of the observer. Johnson expresses this questioning of presumptions by focusing on the observers *a priori* belief that the universe has a symmetry: "Compelled by our faith in the brain's ability to see the core of creation, are we simply filling in the fractures of our imperfect theories? Are quarks and dark matter discoveries or are they inventions, artefacts of the brain's hunger for symmetry?" (Johnson, 1995: 24)

Research into the new and fluid set of phenomena of the New Age spiritualities must equally be sensible of "artefacts" of the mind which impose order on the data. Both conscious assumptions, in the form of typologies, and unconscious predilections, such as the search for order and structure, require cautious appraisal. Those aspects of belief and

practice that are amenable to quantifiable analysis, which fit easily into structural analysis, should also be considered carefully, for the crucial element of change that militates against the reified world of absolute depictions. Given these criteria of caution, the researcher is left with only the ability to make statements of limited applicability, or continually to qualify specific comments. Such a study, it would appear, will result in a survey of individualised instances and meaningless generalisations. Every attempt at clarity will die Anthony Flew's "death of a thousand qualifications" (1955: 107) or emerge in a highly relativised manner, scarcely different from a solipsist expression of the world.

These, at least, are the criticisms to which the nuanced method I am defining should respond. But, the response is already included in the method: by accurately reflecting the ideas of those within the New Age, and by representing these ideas within the broader epistemological context of a critique of existing epistemology, it becomes possible to usefully assert certain "facts" about the New Age spiritualities. These facts are indeed temporally located, but they are no less valuable than other facts, contingent as all facts are upon the language of historical and cultural specificity. It is simply that these facts emerge in a different language-game. The relationship between facts and language, and how they change, requires a brief excursion into Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis.

Wittgenstein asserted that the rules of the language-game need not be explicitly learnt:

The propositions describing the world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game: and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any specific rules. (1969: 95)

But his description here applies to a "common" language.¹ The rules for an unusual or new language have to be specifically described. There is not an "accustomed context" which "allows what is meant to come through clearly" (Wittgenstein, 1969: 237). The onus in bringing forth a new language is to provide transparent presuppositions. The difficulty is to expose the complex system that underlies a "world-picture", and to explain the relationship between facts and the determinants for establishing them as facts.²

This very issue of the relationship between facts, language, the world and our experience of it, is at the heart of many of the claims in the broad spectrum of New Age spiritualities. Much of our experience, it is claimed, is mediated and limited by the functions of our language and the past construction of our knowledge. The overarching paradigm of positivist science has, from the position of the New Age spiritualities, foreclosed many areas of possible human experience, from past lives to past civilisations, from extra-sensory to extra-terrestrial. The paradigm

¹ The notion of a common language is a very loaded concept. One can speak of languages like discourses, with different rules dependent upon different circumstances and indeed different speakers of a language. This issue has again been highlighted by feminist critics of the patriarchal functions of language, cf Adrienne Rich's collection of poems *The Dream of a Common Language*, 1978

² In his response to G. E. Moore's "defence of common sense", Wittgenstein effectively undermines the criteria for the assertion of a basic set of facts which we know through common sense. He states that, "whether a proposition can turn out false after all depends on what I make count as determinants for that proposition" (1969: 5).

shift proposed in the vision and language of New Age spiritualities is of knowledge and experience that extend beyond the narrow parameters of this scientific paradigm.

That language and knowledge can change is not such a revolutionary claim - though sometimes the claims themselves - especially certain millennialist predictions regarding extra-terrestrial visitations may indeed appear revolutionary. Wittgenstein described the process of conceptual, linguistic change:

A meaning of a word is a kind of employment of it. For it is what we learn when the word is incorporated into our language.

If we imagine facts other than as they are, certain language-games lose some of their importance, while others become important. And in this way there is an alteration - a gradual one - in the use of a vocabulary of a language.

When language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change. (1969: 61-65)³

The challenge presented by much of the thinking within the New Age spiritualities amounts to a shift in language-games. For those posing this challenge to scientific epistemology the core theme is that we are in the process of a Kuhnian cultural and epistemic paradigm shift. Many of the concepts of spiritual growth, of transformation, current within the greater part of New Age spiritualities demand conceptual shifts and new language-games.

³ It should be noted that Wittgenstein appears to be adopting a "gradualist" notion of change. However, he is not specific regarding the time frame of his conception of "gradual". Nevertheless, despite the possible conflict between "sudden" and gradual shifts of paradigms both Wittgenstein and Kuhn are engaged in the matter of describing the process whereby knowledge changes.

The new language-game proposed here is a new model for understanding the ideas and social interactions of those within the New Age spiritualities. It is the practical result of the critique given in chapter 1 and the theoretical perspectives outlined in chapter 2. It is a model that seeks to reflect the plurality and eclectic nature of New Age spiritualities, at the same time as highlighting the specificities of New Age religiosity. For, one of the shortcomings of those sociologists situating and modelling the New Age as an NRM is that it does not function like a traditional religion such as Christianity. (That "traditional" religions transgress the fragile boundaries of the concept of "religion" is another issue). David Spangler has given an apt metaphor by which the New Age can be distinguished from traditional religions. He compares Christianity to a cathedral whose architecture is "unified in the person of Jesus Christ"; while the New Age "is more like a flea market or county fair ... [with] ... jesters and jugglers, magicians and shamans, healers and mystics, and the inevitable hucksters eager for a quick sale before packing up and moving on". The error committed by many commentators, according to Spangler, "has been to isolate one or two tents and to deal with them as if they were cathedrals covering the whole fair". The fair, he says, "is a place whose architecture is horizontal rather than vertical" (1993: 80).

This spatial metaphor is a useful entry point for a discussion of models and typologies that may accurately describe the relations and functions of New Age spiritualities. The core theme of the framework I will outline

is interconnections. The pathways of these interconnections form the weblike structure that comprises the shape of the model. To extend Spangler's metaphor, we need to imagine the movements of those visiting the fair during the course of a day. Each person would leave a different trail of footprints from one tent to another. It is our task to reveal the nature of that pathway, to measure the consequences and meanings of the connections made at the fair. The tents, which incorporate certain specific traditions are vital to our study, but they are the nodes, the points of linkage between the pathways - and in this fair, even the tents are not static. It is possible, and indeed useful, to do detailed ethnographic studies of individual tents, for example channelling (Brown, 1996) or the Osho movement (Puttick, 1997),⁴ but such methods will not illuminate the whole. To view the whole, albeit a vision of a shifting pattern, requires a different vantage point that in turn incites the mapping of a new model.

3.2 THE WEB MODEL

3.2.1 Features of the Model

Methodology and phenomena are intertwined: as the former "discovers" the latter, so the latter defines the former. This sympathetic connection is a necessary presupposition if we are accurately to define the field of

⁴ Elizabeth Puttick's research deals with women in NRMs, but her experience and empirical research focuses on the Osho movement - see Puttick, 1997: 4-5.

New Age spiritualities. The model of the web emerges in this interaction of theory and praxis as a means of explaining the complex phenomena that amount to the New Age spiritualities. The web is the interface linking methodology, model and phenomena. It has roots in diverse fields from systems theory to transpersonal psychology. In outlining these roots I will define the key features of the model.

The notion of the web has considerable currency, especially in information technology and the resources of the world wide web. It is significant as a paradigmatic model for living systems (Capra, 1996; Anderson and Hopkins, 1992: 226).⁵ At the same time the idea of the web has been explicitly applied to methodology in the study of religions, as in Rita Gross's construction of a feminist hermeneutic which is a "seamless harmonious web" (1993: 315). The idea of a web of interconnecting approaches is also *implicit* in a number of approaches, such as Helen Thorne's "synthesis of methods" which links multiple social research methods between a bi-polar schema of knowledge and self-reflection (2000: 47-9); Lene Sjørup's "holistic" and "spiral" epistemology (1998: 129); and the model of the "segmented polycentric

⁵ Anderson and Hopkins' reference to Chief Seattle's 1852 response to the United States government inquiry regarding acquisition of Indian territory (which marked the end of the "permanent" frontier) has significant resonances for New Age spiritualities conception of the self immersed in, Arne Naess's notion of, "deep ecology". Seattle's letter is quoted in full in Campbell (1988: 34-5). It has also spawned many creative endeavours including the following poem by Ted Perry:

This we know

All things are connected

Like the blood which unites one family

Whatever befalls the earth

Befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.

Man did not weave the web of life,

He is merely a strand in it

Whatever he does to the web, He does to himself. (Cited in Capra, 1996, inside cover)

integrated network" developed by Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine (1970: xii; 33-4 - see below).

One of the factors influencing this perspective of applying interconnecting methods is the reaction against the limits of unitary linear approaches: Gross takes a stand against the predominant linear phenomenological approach in the history of religions (such as that outlined by Cox, 1992: 24-40); Thorne critiques positivist and interpretative research methods as too linear and "essentially compartmentalised"; while Sjørup suggests such approaches not only limit possible knowledge but may be intrinsic to the degradation of the planet:

Clearly, a holistic epistemology cannot make an aeroplane fly. But it could prevent ecological catastrophes. If we want to search for new knowledge a spiral epistemology may be very useful ...

One epistemology cannot be said to be the 'better'. However, the logical, linear epistemology is the dominant paradigm today. It limits the knowledge we can obtain, barring us from perceiving what we already know. (1998: 129)

The reaction to the limitations of linear methodologies is then a preliminary feature of the methodology of the web, albeit a definition of what it is not. The assumption is that there are complex and ever changing aspects to the phenomena studied which can only be described with an equally complex hermeneutic responsive to this shifting morphology. It is, in some ways, analogous to Derrida's notion of "traces" which combines the historical circumstances of phenomena with the specificities of their present existence at the same time as

interweaving the perspective, or traces, of the scholar's own particularities. Thus, while, text, language, argument necessitate a beginning and proceed *as if* developing a linear progression, it is possible to presume that any beginning emerges in a wider context of many possible beginnings.

The image of the web allows such a presumption: there is no necessary single point of entry. Methodologically the web describes the scholar's use of a multiplicity of methods to define phenomena. It is practicable to outline a single method as a means of study, such as the questionnaire, while recollecting that its application is an abstraction from many concurrent methods or approaches to the phenomena. The web of methods informs and is informed by a single abstracted method. Phenomenologically the image of the web means it is viable to consider a phenomenon in this abstracted sense also. However, without reference to the wider phenomena that constitute the context of singular practices and traditions, such descriptions are fictional or partial abstractions. One might adopt the epithet "context is all" in the descriptive methodology of the web.

Another feature of web theory (as I define it) is that it grows out of systems theory. A general systems theory was developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1968⁶ to describe the basic relationships and principles of

⁶ Capra notes that Bertalanffy is "commonly credited with the first formulation of a comprehensive theoretical framework", but in fact a similar theory, called "tektology" had been developed by the Russian scientist Alexander Bogdanov "twenty or thirty years before" (1996: 43).

living systems. The core rubric for systems thinking is that it focuses on modes of organisation, inter-relation and relationship rather than an atomistic view of intrinsic properties. Philosophically the theory has similarities to Alfred North Whitehead's "process" philosophy and bears some resemblance to Wittgenstein's analysis of language where "meaning is use", that is, concepts are defined by their context. So, for Bertalanffy, living systems are defined by their patterns of organisation. It is, from a systems point of view, fallacious to reduce holistic systems to their parts in order to discover how the system operates.

Another key proponent of systems thinking is Ervin Laszlo, who has built upon Bertalanffy's biological systems theory to consider how the theory applies to culture. Laszlo has called for new scientific laws which deal with "integrated wholes", basing this claim on the principle that "holistic characteristics" of groups or wholes are irreducible and cannot be found in the separate categorisation of their components (1972: 11, 29). The most important aspects of organisms from a systems approach are not their reducible mechanistic functions, but their qualities to organise themselves as wholes. The qualities of self-organisation are the themes that structure the systems worldview. Essentially they are comprised by four related ideas. The first is the idea of "homeostasis", which originally referred to the regulative mechanisms of warm-blooded animals, but in its wider application, refers to the mechanisms that regulate species in the biosphere. The second idea is "phylogenesis", which refers to species evolution rather than individual evolution. From a cultural

perspective phylogenesis stresses an anthropocentric vision. The third idea is "openness" which specifically refers to the dynamic functions of a system necessary to maintain a steady state. Finally, the idea of hierarchy posits a network system whereby, "systemic units collaborate with units of their own level and form super-units, and these, in collaboration, with their own kind, form still higher level units" (Laszlo, 1972: 73). Application of systems theory to the wider context of human society and beyond to the whole biosphere encourages a new ethic from Laszlo:

It allows us to understand that man is one species of system in a complex and embracing hierarchy of nature, and at the same time it tells us that all systems have value and intrinsic worth ... Seeing himself as a connecting link in a complex natural hierarchy cancels man's anthropocentrism, but seeing the hierarchy itself as an expression of self-ordering and self-creating nature bolsters his self-esteem and encourages his humanism. (1972: 118)

It is a vision at once resonant with a late-Victorian sense of man's responsibility (normative masculine gender pronoun included), and in sympathy with the more contemporary ethical standpoints of ecological awareness or even the 1993 World Parliament of Religions' "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic" (cf Kung and Kuschel eds. 1993). There are however, certain elements within the criteria of systems thinking which resemble those I have elucidated regarding the web - most significantly, the ideas of inter-relationship and dynamism with the emphasis on holistic characteristics.

3.2.2 Capra's Theory of the Web

Systems theory has progressed since Laszlo's definition of a "natural philosophy" and now more directly embraces both scientific and cultural worldviews, especially in the work of Fritjof Capra. I am greatly indebted to Capra's specific creation and explication of the web as a model for living systems, in *The Web of Life* (1996) and "The Web Page" in *Resurgence* (1997-9). Capra has taken up Laszlo's broader concerns with the environment and human culture and society.⁷ The focus of Capra's notion of the web does, however, differ from the systems of Laszlo through the rejection of hierarchical models because they are representative of "patriarchal society" (1996: 10). In fact Capra defines a new paradigm shift in culture and society "from structure to process" (1992: xii) which amounts to a "shift in social organisation from hierarchies to networks" (1996: 10).

From an empirical perspective this excessively general claim of a paradigm shift is open to considerable counter-argument and examples - hierarchies quite obviously function in many areas of society today. Contrary examples can equally be found to undermine his corollary statement of the "shift from objective science to 'epistemic' science" (1992: xiii). A basic knowledge of the way we teach science in our

⁷ Capra outlined his concept of society, in conversation with David Steindl-Rast and Thomas Matus, using the notion of paradigms, but it is apt to apply this vision to his understanding of how society functions as a network: "A social paradigm, for me, is a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions and practices, shared by a community that forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way the community organises itself" (1992: 34).

schools through the National Curriculum (in England and Wales) would show that the notion of objective science is a live and functioning paradigm. Nevertheless, Capra is correct in asserting the increasing influence of network models in science and the broader perspective of contemporary culture. It is worth citing Capra's explanation of how networks function at some length in order to clarify the fundamental features of the image of interaction and inter-dependence:

The view of living systems as networks provides a novel perspective on the so-called 'hierarchies' of nature. Since living systems at all levels are networks, we must visualise the web of life as living systems (networks) interacting in network fashion with other systems (networks). For example, we can picture an ecosystem schematically as a network with a few nodes. Each node represents an organism, which means that each node, when magnified, appears itself as a network. Each node in the new network may represent an organ, which in turn will appear as a network when magnified and so on.

In other words, the web of life consists of networks within networks. At each scale, under close scrutiny, the nodes of the network reveal themselves as smaller networks. We tend to arrange these systems, all nesting within larger systems, in a hierarchical scheme by placing the larger systems above the smaller in pyramid fashion. But this is a human projection. In nature, there is no 'above', nor 'below', and there are no hierarchies. There are only networks nesting within other networks. (1996: 35)

We thus have an image markedly similar to Spangler's horizontal fair. In terms of the phenomena of New Age spiritualities there is no hierarchy of organisation, unless the observer specifically adopts one, such as the statistical significance of certain New Age groupings (some tents/networks *are* bigger than others). It is simply the case that there

are manifold networks operating within the larger network I have defined as New Age spiritualities. But Capra should go further, because even the creation of networks is part of a human construction which, from a postmodern perspective can be conceived as "at best no more than a temporarily useful fiction masking chaos" (Tarnas, 1991: 401). The web is a means of organising the chaos of overlapping institutions and practices that are the network of New Age spiritualities.

Within Capra's definition of ever-magnifiable networks is the notion of holography. The holographic model of the world is another significant idea in the realm of New Age thinking (Ferguson, 1980: 177-187; Wilber, 1982; Hanegraaff, 1996: 139-151). It emerged from the field of neuroscience when Karl Pribram suggested, in 1966, that the explanation for the continuation of memory, despite damage to major cognitive areas of the brain, was that memory is encoded in an "engram" not locally, but distributed across the whole brain. Holography provides the explanation because a hologram can be entirely reconstructed from any single particle, even if the "whole" is broken. Capra's network model resembles this theory in that however much a network may be disassembled, its structural and constitutive units are always to be found in a network pattern.

Where Capra diverges from a strictly holographic model is that the hologram is still composed of discrete units or particles and Capra seeks to divest his theory of the objective existence of particles - "what we call a part is merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships" (1992:

83). Furthermore the holograph is static, while Capra's networks are essentially dynamic. The position he assumes is close to that of the non-realist in that our theories of the world are not representational, they do not simply reflect an external reality. He is, however, careful not to enmesh himself in the more radical subjectivist position that there is *only* our description of the world and no *real* world to describe. The basis for Capra's nuanced position is the theory of networks where "things do not have intrinsic properties. All the properties flow from their relationships" (1992: 84). There is an *a priori* assumption of "things" to have "relationships", but these things can only be described, accurately, in terms of their relationships. This aspect of Capra's theory rests on the biologic-epistemic model of cognition developed by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1987).

In *The Tree of Knowledge*, Maturana and Varela set themselves the objective of outlining "a theory of knowledge ... to show how knowing generates the explanation of knowing" which is quite different from "the phenomenon of explaining and the phenomenon explained belong[ing] to different domains" (1987: 239). They explicitly seek a *via media* "eschewing the extremes of representationalism (objectivism) and solipsism (idealism)" (241) by constructing their theory on the principle that "human cognition as effective action pertains to the biological domain, but it is always lived in a cultural tradition" (244). They conclude that the "knowledge of knowledge compels" towards ethical considerations. For if this knowledge is biological and cultural, every

expression of it emerges from a "network of interactions" with the world and the human community. Thus, the "social imperative for a human-centred ethics" arises out of the understanding of the network relationships whereby "every human act has an ethical meaning because it is an act of constitution of the human world" (1987: 239-250).

Again we can recognise in this model of human interaction and knowledge certain themes that helpfully inform the web theory. The logical link between the phenomenon of explaining and the phenomena of the explained adds emphasis to the tenet (established in chapter 1) that "there must be some compatibility between the method of study and the phenomenon studied". Equally the observation that humans make meanings in a "network of interactions" seems further to establish the features of networks as the key to unlocking the nature of the many spiritualities developing in the New Age "fair". At the same time, the ethical imperative this self-reflective knowledge entails may partly explain the social and political activism espoused by many within the New Age spiritualities.

3.2.3 Transpersonal Models and the Web

Beyond Capra's networks and often incorporating holonomic or holographic theories of reality, the field of transpersonal psychology has useful insights to add to the web model. The sympathy many transpersonal psychologists feel for the holographic theory lies in a specific feature of the model that gives an explanation for transcendental

or trans-human experience. The explanation lies with the corollary notion Pribram developed to the idea of a holographic memory, that the universe may also be holographic. Human perceptions of other worldly knowledge, even Jungian archetypes, occur according to this theory, because of the concordance of the holographic mind with the holographic universe. There is a connection with a "frequency realm" or "holographic blur", which allows transpersonal experience.

Not all advocates of transpersonal models of the human psyche concur with the "holographic paradigm". Ken Wilber is at pains to dissociate the holographic model of perception from what he considers to be the "eternal ground" of human experience that is beyond any structure, including that of the holographic frequency realm. Wilber considers the holographic model a useful metaphor for a pantheist expression of the world, where each aspect of the world contains the whole. Indeed, in this sense one might consider the holographic idea as parallel to Indra's many jewelled net or even the dharma-realm of the *Avatamsaka sutra*. "They perceive that the many fields and assemblies and the beings and the aeons are all reflected in each particle of dust" (trans. Williams, 1989: 124). Wilber however, acerbically notes that this "timeless zone" of the holograph can be recorded like a tape by optical holography machines "which has little to do with a metaphysical ... eternity" - "break the tape recorder ... and there goes your eternity. An eternity dependent for its existence on a temporal structure, tape or brain, is a strange eternity" (1982: 252-3).

Nevertheless, with or without the holographic model, transpersonal psychology and transpersonal ecology work under a paradigm of the human psyche which has a similar morphology to that of the web. The essence of this view is that the individual human psyche is situated in an intricate network of connections beyond the human self. (Warwick Fox correctly defines *trans-* in the context of transpersonal psychology as "beyond" rather than "across" (1990: 198)). Stanislav Grof suggests a "cartography of the unconscious" which includes not only the individual biographical, but also the perinatal and transpersonal dimensions. Perinatal, for Grof, refers to biological birth and pre-birth experiences. He uses transpersonal to refer to other experiences beyond the temporal embodied self, which include "peak experiences" and past-life experiences (in conversation with Russell Di Carlo, 1996: 119-120.) Some transpersonal psychologists, such as Abraham Maslow who has studied "peak experiences" (1987), have focused on one specific aspect of the transpersonal element of the human psyche much as some scholars have made ethnographic studies of individual practices amongst the New Age spiritualities. Other transpersonal psychologists, such as Roberto Assagioli (1988), have further refined the notion of the unconscious mind established first by Freud followed by Jung, as including more distinct and definable elements in the forms of "the superconscious and the spiritual Self" (1988: 23).

The key to each of these developments on the psychological model of the individual psyche developed by Freud is that there are complex

interconnections and patterns of relationship, which determine the characteristics of the psyche. Any approach to understanding the whole psyche from this perspective therefore requires recognition of the wider pattern of relationships. Analysis of the discrete individual biography is analogous to describing one sector of the web. It would be equally possible to analyse another sector, such as peak experiences, but it would only provide one particular view of the whole human being. To arrive at a holistic description requires a web model and methodology.

Certain transpersonal theorists, such as Wilber, have sought to retain a hierarchical model of evolution, including the evolution of human consciousness, as the fundamental structure of the interconnections and patterns defining transpersonal psychology. Yet it is possible to consider these patterns without hierarchy. In fact, according to Warwick Fox, Wilber's hierarchical assumptions are indicative of his anthropocentric world-view. Fox's critique brings transpersonal theorising closer to the radically non-hierarchical and multiple entry points of web methodology.

The central thesis of Fox's *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (1990) is that a qualified expression of transpersonal theory under the rubric of Arne Naess's "philosophical sense of deep ecology" provides a non-anthropocentric, non-hierarchical model for psychology that is ethically committed. He defines "transpersonal ecology" as "the idea of the this-worldly realisation of as expansive a sense of self as possible" (1990: 204). He is thus less interested in the transcendental impetus which was formative in the creation of transpersonal psychology (in the work of

Assagioli, Grof and Maslow) but retains a wider notion of identity incorporating the complex connections of interdependence. Fox cites Frances Vaughan's description of the self in this context:

Conceptualising the self as an ecosystem existing within a larger ecosystem can therefore facilitate the shift from thinking of the self as a separate, independent entity to recognising its complete interdependence in the totality ... [This] view of the self challenges the assumption that we exist only as alienated, isolated individuals in a hostile, or at best, indifferent environment. (Quoted in Fox, 1990: 203)

In terms of the idea of self, what is offered here significantly opposes the narcissistic conception of Self provided by Paul Heelas' notion of Self-religions. But with reference to the category of New Age spiritualities we are again presented with the necessity of considering groups and individuals in terms of the wider web of interconnections rather than as isolable units with discrete boundaries.

3.2.4 "Family Resemblances" and SPINS

Wittgenstein coined the idea of "family resemblances" to characterise the relationships between ostensibly differing organisations. He used the example of games whereby, for example, the key principles structuring chess and football are quite different, yet both come within the field of games and the concept of "game". In Religious Studies the idea of family resemblances has been adopted by Ninian Smart to support the functional meaning of the idea of religions: where it is possible to conceive of two distinct and disparate belief systems, such as Marxism and Taoism, yet relate them through other contiguous traditions which

share resemblances with both (1986: 46-7). The same idea has been used by Eileen Barker (1989: 189) to describe the New Age movement, and it also occurs in a footnote in Wouter Hanegraaff's work (1996: 14). It is applicable to the web as another typology that conceives a maximum differentiation of phenomena at the same time as allowing multiple approaches to study the phenomena.

In the notion of family resemblances there is an implicit assumption of shared characteristics. The criteria governing the essentials of family characteristics are, however, by no means absolute. Hanegraaff, for example, isolates four "major trends of New Age religion": channelling, healing and personal growth, new age science, and neo-Paganism. These categories, he seeks to persuade, share sufficient essential characteristics to constitute the central components of New Age religion. The considerable omissions of eastern religious traditions for example (and those cited by Rose - cf chapter 1) undermine his typology. Equally, many spokespersons of neo-Pagan movements are unhappy about being classified as a part of the New Age.⁸ Some scholars, notably Michael York, have sought to outline the many similarities and convergences of the basic beliefs between New Age and neo-Pagan movements, while recognising significant differences of worldview (York, 1995: 144-177).

These problems of self-description and classification are overcome, in

⁸ This became especially clear to me in private conversations with prominent neo-Pagans Graham Harvey and Joanne Pearson. See also Harvey's excoriating criticisms of New Age (1997: 219-220 - considered in chapter 8)

part, by the notion of a web of *relationships* rather than an assumption of similarity or identity of beliefs. In this way the family resemblances may be conceived not as essentially issues of religious *belief* but the functions of *interaction*, which may include religious beliefs as one form of these interactions. In other words, while the practices and beliefs of the New Age spiritualities are undoubtedly significant, the underlying familial resemblances are to be found in the *modes of connection* between individuals, organisations and the wider network. The genealogy of the family resides more in the form than the content.

It is thus apposite to relate the notion of family resemblances to Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine's concept of "segmented polycentric integrated networks". Three years of research into the dynamics of the Pentecostal and Black Power movements provided the research basis for Gerlach and Hine's model. The central features of the model they developed relate to the structural composition of the movement and are defined such that "an organisation can be characterised as a network - decentralised, segmentary and reticulate". These features are elaborated to describe the essential structure of such movements: "decentralisation has to do with the decision-making, regulatory functions of the movement" which is not "acephalous" with a unitary hierarchy, but "polycephalous"; "segmentation has to do with the social structure - the composition of parts that make up the movement as a whole"; "reticulation has to do with the way these parts are tied together into a network" (1970: 34-5). They note that "according to Webster

something that is reticulate is weblike, resembling a network - with crossing and inter-crossing lines" (1970: 55). This model clearly has similarities to the web model articulated in this chapter, especially in terms of methodology.

3.2.5 Webs as "Thick Descriptions"

The problem of defining the web as at once multivalent and radically flattened, in order to avoid hierarchical presuppositions, is that as an image it appears to be two-dimensional. I have established a methodological presupposition that the phenomena included under the rubric New Age spiritualities function socially and conceptually like a web, a web which may be defined as a reticulated family that is (to appropriate Freud's dictum of human sexuality) "polymorphous perverse" in its interconnections. But the metaphor could become too flattened as representing merely the structural formation of New Age spiritualities and thus lose the dynamism and life which is an essential component of the contemporary existence of the manifold spiritualities. Indeed, without reference to the wider context that includes historical influences, the effects of other religious traditions as well as individual biographies, the web is lifeless. A more accurate model, at least as a functional image of the New Age spiritualities, is the three-dimensional geodesic design of the carbon atom, Buckminsterfullerene. The shape of this carbon atom is often likened to a segmentary football whereby the electrons are reticulated from the centre of the atom yet interconnect with each other. There is thus an extended web of connections around the central node.

At least with such a metaphor, there is a sense of depth to both phenomena and methodology.

The notion of depth is a vital component of web methodology. If the heuristic framework of the web is to succeed in its object, to describe accurately and representatively the New Age spiritualities, the description must amount to more than a simple listing of network connections. There are many sources for this type of description, for example Campbell and Brennan's "dictionary of New Age ideas, people places and terms" (1994); Brady and Considine's listing of "psychotherapy, alternative health and spiritual centres", (1990); or more local frequent publications such as, in the West of England, *The Spark* (a quarterly free newspaper composed largely of local listings of events and centres for alternative health and spirituality), and *South West Connection* (a quarterly magazine, composed largely of local listings which in its own words, is a "guide to personal development and natural therapies"). The web should elicit "thicker" descriptions.

In this context, Clifford Geertz's essay on *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture* (1973) offers perspectives on methodology that provide the ground for such a thick, deeper analysis. He asserts that "cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete" (29) a statement which is congruent with my claim of the "limited applicability", contingency and temporal location of any "facts" I may assert regarding the New Age spiritualities. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the scholar to attempt to "construct a reading of" the phenomena, whilst recognising that this is a

reading, an imposition of form on the phenomena. For, as Geertz explains:

What the ethnographer is in fact faced with ... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. (1973: 10)

Geertz reiterates the necessity of using the voices of those who are being described. The great problem is:

An explosion of debate as to whether particular analyses (which come in the form of taxonomies, paradigms, tables, trees and other ingenuities) reflect what the natives "really" think or are merely clever simulations, logically equivalent but substantively different, of what they think. (1973: 11)

The consequence of this problem is the necessity of developing a method that overcomes, at least in part, unrepresentative "clever simulations". The objection that the impossibility of arriving at a final, objective, *entirely* representative description therefore entails all descriptions are subjective expressions is, as Geertz points out, "like saying that as a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in a sewer" (1973: 30). The key is to develop a methodology and a method that is a plausible depiction of the self-expression of the "natives".

Yet the web is simply a metaphor. The polymethodic approaches of the scholar of religion could be accounted for by another image perhaps, and the multiplicity of the phenomena have been portrayed in many ways in postmodern analyses of culture. Nevertheless, any theoretical

framework is equally as historically situated as the ostensible object of its study. The web emerges in contemporary culture as an image of interconnection, as a model of the "situatedness" or contextual nature of knowledge. The web also has a role as a model for living systems as an alternative to the linear positivistic schema that resonate in evolutionary principles and ideas of progress that yet pervade the epistemologies of modernity. Finally, it can be seen to be congruent as a methodological principle with a model of the phenomena of the New Age spiritualities. It is not logically necessary for methodology and model to resemble one another so long as the scholar is transparent in the presentation of a thesis where the epistemological assumptions of scholar and phenomena are significantly different. However, if a key aim is to represent the views of a culture or movement it is necessary to develop a more ethnomethodological standpoint. In this thesis ethnomethodology begins with the assumption that my methodology will elicit the views of those I study, not evidence for a pre-defined typology or support for my epistemology - from this perspective it is possible to provide a thick description of what the "natives" really think. The web is the key to the ethnomethodological approach I have adopted for this study.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD: SOCIAL RESEARCH STYLES IN THIS STUDY

But there is no sharp boundary between methodological propositions and propositions within a method. (Wittgenstein, 1969: 318)

... a social setting ... operates at its own rather than the observer's convenience. (Lofland, 1971: 101)

... the researcher, the discipline, the culture to be translated, and the culture into which it is translated form an interwoven amalgam of events. (Bryman, 1988: 80)

4.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

4.1.1 Purpose and Hypotheses

Influenced by Geertz's interpretive approach to culture I wished to avoid merely painting an "outsider's" gloss over my research data, thereby losing the subtleties of the actual experience of the researched community. My description should be one that an "insider" recognises, explicitly. It is a simple statement of intent, but it carries complex resonances in terms of social research methods. Just as no idea emerges in a contextless vacuum, so no practical study can be carried out without reference to the theoretical context of adopting a method and the pragmatic context of its application. In terms of social inquiry there is a defined historical tradition which places my statement of purpose in a tradition of qualitative ethnography. A qualitative ethnomethodology

overlays my former phenomenological assumptions regarding the morphology and ontology of religions. That is to say, before this study I had assumed that the phenomenological approach to the study of religions was the most appropriate (cf Smart, 1969, 1973), but the process of research has revealed to me the necessity for greater reflexivity. Simply, just as for Mervyn Peake “the dream of reason produces monsters,” so the dream of phenomenological neutrality produces misshapen religious identities. It is only by highlighting methods of involvement and practical engagement that it is possible to uncover individual’s religious experience and expression.

There are some resources for such a research project in the application of phenomenological perspectivalism. This amounts to a redefinition of phenomenology away from the strict neutrality and “methodological agnosticism” espoused by scholars such as Ninian Smart (1973), and towards a self-reflexivity that recognises the commitments of the researcher. This reflexivity is clearly influenced by post-structuralist critiques of knowledge, including the discourse analysis of Foucault and gender-based analyses of feminist scholars. But while methodological propositions inform a style or an approach to gathering information, they do not represent coherent steps by which that information may be gathered. The process I have followed in my research has been first to define a methodological position, then develop a set of methods by which I might obtain relevant, informative data from fieldwork research. Phenomenological fieldwork, despite a subtle methodological stance,

has many limitations. The practical methods involved in collecting data are clumsy (cf Cox, 1992: 24ff). The keystones of *epoché* and *eidetic* intuition, to the whole edifice of phenomenology are problematic in fieldwork as much as in theory. That the scholar can “bracket out” presumptions and previous perceptions is debatable, while the notion of achieving an essentialist intuition of manifold and complex phenomena undermines the very diversity of these phenomena. These shortcomings led me beyond phenomenology to the field of social research.

There are indeed many better resources than those of phenomenology for the researcher in the literature of social research. Yet these need to be sifted in equally as measured a way as the theoretical propositions underlying epistemology and methodology. For, beneath the pragmatism and utility of research methods, from surveys to data analyses, lie methodological assumptions regarding the intrinsic nature of social systems. As an example we may consider Peter Beyer's explanation of “the religious system of global society” using Niklas Luhmann's concept of “function systems”:

a religious system is not a mere agglomeration of “things”, but rather the social differentiation and social construction of a recognisably religious category of action or way of communicating which manifests itself primarily through numerous equally recognisable social institutions ... The religious system is the institutional expression of the category of religion.

From a Luhmannian perspective, a social system is an entity that constitutes itself through the continuous and recursive production of connected series of communications based on meaning. *The communications (and not people) are the basic*

elements of a social system. (My emphasis. Beyer, 1998: 8-9)

From this highly problematic formulation we would find that, for example, a questionnaire based survey of an individual's religious beliefs would focus upon themes that illustrated the network of meaning around the concept and communication of religion, without reference to the psychological and biographical details which influence the individual's notion of religion. While meaning, language, communications are all vital aspects of the web of New Age spiritualities it would be quite mistaken to remove people as "basic elements" from a study of these spiritualities. One of the core features of New Age religiosity is the personal construction of religious identity. Therefore, the New Age as a social system, that is, a functional category amenable to social research, subverts Beyer's claim of bracketing out people from a social system. Research into New Age spiritualities necessarily includes individual biography. Indeed, individual biographies are the framework of experience and ideas that define the reticulate web of this social system. A method of inquiry that drew on Luhmann/Beyer's communication-based social system would miss significant aspects of the nature of New Age spiritualities.

From a consideration of Beyer's preconception of the nature of the object of study we can see the truism that theory underlies practice, as much as theory underlies theory. A theory of research necessarily precedes the process of study, whether or not this is explicitly framed. Simply, fieldwork notes are not made on a *tabula rasa*. The demands of

accuracy require that the theories and hypotheses developed as a preliminary to fieldwork research are transparent. Honesty about personal preconceptions must be rigorously pursued in the adoption of specific fieldwork practices.

Underlying, or at least influencing, the choice of methods is an equally stringent set of pragmatic considerations, including time and cost constraints. Both before and during the fieldwork phase of my research I had to recognise that the purity of my purpose would always be compromised by practical limitations. However, I considered the value of allowing these parameters to inform the research process and the development of my ideas, to lead me away from the tendency to seek support for my hypotheses and toward a more open-ended reflection of what I discovered "out there", in the field. I placed this value of openness, against a category of sufficiency, whereby my fieldwork results needed to be sufficient to sustain or refute any initial hypotheses produced in my survey of the literature. I also consciously appropriated the notion of traces or strands as an image for any conclusions I would make regarding the entire research and writing process, thereby to avoid the hegemonistic closure of final (in the sense of conclusive) statements. My work should point towards other fragments in the discourse of the academic study of religions and provide entry points for further study of New Age spiritualities.

Central concerns in this research were those of reliability and validity. Any data I gathered had to fulfil at least these criteria. Yet the theoretical

research on methods of data gathering shows the complexity of addressing these issues adequately (Lofland, 1971; Phillips, 1971; Bryman, 1988; Gilbert, 1993). Significant problems regarding samples, measurements, bias and “falsification” (Gilbert, 1993: 24), not only affected my research strategy, the methods I *would* adopt, but also my research process, the methods I *did* adopt. Furthermore, my research strategy had been, to a certain extent, developed in the process of analysing the literature and defining my epistemological and methodological assumptions. Before I began the fieldwork I had already refined a working definition of spirituality in New Age spiritualities as well as a set of basic claims and hypotheses regarding the nature of New Age spiritualities. These hypotheses are worth simply stating here as they inform the choice of methods whereby the research process moved from foundational formulations towards coherent sophisticated assertions. The hypotheses are presented as a series of statements reflecting the form of New Age spiritualities as a whole, and specific beliefs which represent core concerns:

1. New Age is a term with considerable currency and breadth used in media and academic reporting of a contemporary phenomenon related to alternative approaches to spirituality and religiosity.
2. New Age is a millennial concept that prophesies a “new dawn” for human consciousness and the human spirit.
3. New Age spiritualities are an eclectic mix of traditional religious beliefs and contemporary responses to modernity.
4. New Age spiritualities involve a pluralist politically motivated worldview intent on changing the hegemony

of the all-embracing paradigm of the post-enlightenment scientific worldview.

5. New Age spiritualities include a prelapsarian romantic worldview which seeks a return to pre-enlightenment human organisations and forms of knowledge (which is in fact an enlightenment notion as it emerges in Rousseau's idea of the "noble savage").

6. New Age spiritualities are a consequence of modernity as defined by Weberian and post-Weberian notions of rationalisation, secularisation, routinisation and globalisation, whereby the New Age is the last gasp in the decline of religion.

7. New Age spiritualities are a consequence of modernity as a new development in the process of the decline of authority and the rise of the self and the individual as the prime social factor - hence, "self-religions".

8. New Age spiritualities are a consequence of the philosophical debunking of absolute positions regarding Truth, emphasising a relativist moral and post modern epistemological worldview.

9. New Age spiritualities are a consequence of the post-industrial technological age which has brought about globalisation and the corollaries of multicultural societies and pluralist visions of religious truth.

10. New Age spiritualities comprise a set of beliefs and practices with multiple leaders and traditions with a single core worldview expressed in the concept of humanity and the world as "spiritual" - the *philosophia perennis*.

It is possible to further homogenise and reduce these hypotheses into four hypothetical assertions:

1. New Age spiritualities are eclectic, dynamic and as multiplicitous as the beliefs of those within the category.

2. New Age spiritualities have superficial historical roots as distinct phenomena but considerable intellectual grounding in the history of western thought. That is, while the phenomena have little historical depth *qua* religious movements, there are deep historical

roots in many of the ideas adopted and practised within the groups of the New Age spiritualities.

3. New Age spiritualities constitute a worldview which is of considerable significance for those who adopt it.

4. New Age spiritualities have a morphology explicitly shaped by the thought and structures of modernity.

The research process that led to these statements began with a defined purpose, that they could not be considered conclusive in any way without the voices of those people whom the statements sought to describe. Viable conclusions, from this perspective, are dependent upon the expressions of the researched community. The above hypotheses represent generalised assertions about New Age spiritualities, while the qualitative data on *The Spark* and *Psychology of Vision* inform and provide specific examples of these assertions. It will be evident however, that individual testimonies can only be a fraction of this whole picture. Even considered as a discrete segment, the fieldwork quite obviously can illustrate only a specific and limited set of conclusions on New Age spiritualities as a whole. Moreover, the idea and image of the web germinated in my theoretical research as much as in my fieldwork. The idea of a web of methods and webs of phenomena is thus a more extensive rubric for research than merely a frame for defining the results of questionnaires and interviews. My point is to confirm the crucial role of the qualitative data to “fill out” the web, to illustrate the interactions of beliefs and practices. However, I equally wish to affirm that my conclusions are not solely dependent upon practical ethnography.

4.1.2 Ethnomethodological Praxis

Sandra Harding's strict differentiation of method and methodology (see my Introduction) defines research method as a "technique" which comprises three distinct approaches:

A research method is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence. One could reasonably argue that all evidence-gathering techniques fall into one of the following categories: listening to (or interrogating) informants, observing behaviour, or examining historical traces and records. In this sense, there are only three methods of social inquiry. (Harding, 1987: 2)

All three have a part to play in the ethnomethodological praxis of my research. The method of examining historical traces is comparable to the textual study undertaken by any scholar - it is the investigation of written records from within, or about, a field of study, that is to say, a review of the relevant literature. The methods of "observing behaviour" and "listening to informants" constitute the method of participant observation I have adopted for this study. It would, however, be possible to formulate a fourth method of this "technique", overlooked by Harding, that of writing (the ethnography of ethnomethodology). Writing is concomitant to these other research methods, as "gathering evidence" is, at the same time, a process of constructing evidence. For, before, during and after the fieldwork research the researcher is actively construing how the results shall be recorded and expressed. In fact, as Alan Bryman states there are a further three components to "the presentation of the native's point of view":

The way in which the natives view the world; the ethnographers interpretation of how they view the world; and the ethnographer's construction of his or her interpretation of the native's view of the world for the ethnographer's own intellectual and cultural community. (Bryman, 1988: 80)

The act of writing is as intrinsic a process to social inquiry as fieldwork research. This is because all inquiry is also partly construction. The inquirer participates in the object of study and formulates categories by which to present that object. One of the main reasons for the historical emergence of "participant-observation" was this realisation - the notion that observation proceeds separated from the observer is untenable, for there is a significant role of the observer as participator. The participatory role of the ethnographer has been best expressed in the field of anthropological ethnography (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Atkinson, 1990; Turner, 1994; Featherstone, 1995). From the time of Malinowski's analyses of the Trobriand islanders (1961) as James Clifford states, "the 'method' of participant-observation has enacted a delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity" (1986: 13). The balance has swayed towards the pivotal significance of the subjective, or cultural construction by the observer. This has especially become clear since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) which provided the seminal example of the ways in which the other is more cultural construction than objective reality.

Yet anthropological constructions of culture and sociological constructions of social systems still depend upon a certain facticity - the collection and presentation of data. As a distinctive and academically

respectable position (an approach which certainly was not acceptable before the twentieth century), I have chosen to place myself within the picture I am seeking to describe; I have adopted, in this section on method, quite specifically to use the personal pronoun. The facts of my research, the objective etic viewpoints taken in this study are always mediated by an emic standpoint, as Kenneth Pike says, "from inside the system" (1964: 28). Being inside the system has garnered rich, "thick" data which, albeit inappropriate for broad quantitative claims, satisfies a qualitative rubric; that is to say, it is not possible to mathematically extrapolate statements about *all* New Age spiritualities from the evidence, but the descriptive detail is sufficient to define some individuals within New Age spiritualities, as well as a major psychotechnology within the field (*Psychology of Vision*) and the role of a significant free local newspaper (*The Spark*). Furthermore, the data can be used to corroborate wider claims about the nature of the manifold New Age spiritualities.

In my own research, as in much qualitative research, there is also an element of quantitative data that yield limited, though reliable, statistical information. However, my qualitative stance does indeed arise from a different epistemological standpoint from the purely statistical quantitative position. The static data of quantitative analysis simply fail to discover the complex dynamic nature of New Age spiritualities. Quantitative studies of New Age phenomena have tended to result in categories that do not reflect the actual morphology of New Age thought

and practice (cf chapter 1). Nevertheless, a proportion of the information obtained in my questionnaires is amenable to statistical analysis and does bear fruit in terms of useful information on independent variables of age, gender, income, as well as significant dependent variables such as religious affiliations. A much wider survey would be necessary to accurately test the validity of general statistical claims regarding the influence of New Age spiritualities as, for example, Stuart Rose indicated in his survey of 908 people (1996, 1998). But my purpose was not to test but to contribute, refine and develop a model that is flexible enough to incorporate the fluid nature of individuals' spiritual paths. The only valid means of assuring sufficient insight into these circuitous, shifting and often tortuous paths was through in-depth interviews.

Fieldwork is not carried out in isolation from the predefined theories that initiated the proposal to carry out the fieldwork in the first place. Neither is it carried out without the continual cerebral interaction of the fieldwork researcher. Practical research is as theory-laden as theoretical analysis from inception to conclusion. The procedure of data collection is not a chronologically distinct set of methods separated from theory development, but rather, as Helen Thorne has described her research, a "synthesis of methods" (2000: 47). Nevertheless, it is possible to outline a set of methods in a formal structure of sequential steps. It is simply important to recognise that the strategy presented by what appears to be a unilinear research process is in fact continually informed by a multiplicity of layers of theory development and refinement. Equally, it

should also be accepted that fieldwork cannot progress in a straight line as it is continually affected by the multiple vicissitudes of fate (see below, 4.2).

The set of methods adopted and employed in my research are recognisably those utilised by many involved in qualitative social inquiry, being a combination of the “four major methods” as defined by David Silverman: “observation; analysing texts and documents; interviews; recording and transcribing” (1993: 8-9). There is also an important influence in my use of these methods from ethnography. The ethnographic emphasis shaping these methods is complex and gives a particular “flavour” to the way in which the research methods are employed. One influence is the ethnographer’s ability to become involved in the social world she or he is studying. Nigel Fielding compares such a practice to Weber’s empathetic process of *Verstehen* - understanding by being able to think like the “natives” (1993b: 157). Fielding goes on to cite Lofland’s ethical and practical preliminary questions for the researcher: “Am I reasonably able to get along with these people? Am I reasonably comfortable in their presence?” (Lofland, 1971: 94) The answers to these questions must be “a qualified yes” for Lofland if the research is to continue successfully. Lofland proceeds to suggest other prerequisites for ethnographic research: on one hand there is a category of “*socially acceptable and standardised incompetence*” for the researcher to take the role of “*one who is to be taught*”, while on the other hand in some settings it is important to show

“some special bond and ‘expertise’” to be accepted by the studied community (Lofland’s emphases; 1971: 101). These categories are the intrinsic practice of the method of ethnography whereby the ethnographer goes “native” (Fielding, 1993b: 158). Both approaches, expert and, to use Lofland’s terminology, incompetent, were roles I took during the fieldwork process. These roles are, paradoxically perhaps, complementary attitudes in creating a knowledgeable yet open listener, particularly in interviews. My intent was not manipulative, in the sense of creating the circumstances for particular types of answers, but it was a consciously enacted role in order to *allow* the interviewee to express him or herself with as little reticence as possible. Thus, the expert satisfies the frequent fear of those within the New Age spiritualities that their views are odd or abnormal, while the incompetent is there to be taught which requires the interviewee to express his or her ideas with clarity.

Two further aspects of these adopted roles yet need iteration: the interviewer as sympathetic insider and the honesty of the researcher, of which the last is most important. The insider is a feature of the role of expert, but the emphasis is not one of considerable knowledge (though that may be the case) but one of a qualified understanding. The belief in my honesty as a researcher and the research process was a crucial prerequisite for informants and interviewees in their decision to talk about their beliefs. Religious beliefs, for many people, have a much greater emotional content than an intellectual one. If respondents to surveys and interviews are to reflect honestly to the researcher they

must first of all find a corresponding integrity in the researcher and the research. The intimacy required in my research depended upon my subjects' preliminary belief that my project had value, though they could not control my conclusions.

Another recognisable feature of ethnographic accounts is the personal style of presenting the fieldwork research. This is a result of the emphases on field notes and on personal reflection about the experience of fieldwork research as a key component of writing up results. Thus we find Mary Louise Pratt claiming that "personal narrative is a conventional component of ethnographies" (1986: 31). However, she distinguishes between "formal ethnography" which "counts as professional capital and as an authoritative representation" and personal narratives which are "often deemed self-indulgent, trivial or heretical in other ways" (1986: 31). Her distinction is, though, an ironic critique of the peripheralisation of personal narratives as outside the rubric of social science, although she recognises that certain ethnographies remain "infuriatingly ambiguous". My own research explicitly brings my ethnographic "self" to the centre of the fieldwork process, but I have avoided recounting field notes as far as possible, inasmuch as they represent my own experience, in order to dwell on the experiences of those who I am researching.

A further aspect of ethnography informing qualitative social inquiry is the role of writing. Paul Atkinson describes the "rhetoric" of the ethnographer as similar to that of the historian:

[They] share very similar commitments and resources. Each is committed to a systematic and thorough account of cultural phenomena, yet neither can reproduce all the “evidence” and detail available. There is an element of *bricolage* in both types of writing. The historian will find him or herself using “telling” examples, quotations and instances in order to convey to the reader more general or diffuse phenomena. So too will the ethnographer. They will both employ appropriate metaphors or models in order to impose order, coherence and meaning on their materials. (1990: 49)

This is an accurate description of the methods of my research writing. The important point is that the very act of writing is central to the presentation of the phenomena. Therefore it is entirely appropriate that Atkinson entitles the chapter from which the above excerpt is extracted “Ethnography and the poetics of authoritative accounts” while Clifford and Marcus’s influential text on the same theme is entitled *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986).

While writing constructs and conveys the research findings (even as they are “discovered”), another core feature of ethnography structures the practice of interviewing. Guidelines regarding structuring and performing interviews are to be found in many social research foundational texts (Phillips, 1971; Lazarsfeld, 1972; Mann, 1985; Silverman, 1993; Fielding, 1993a). The key themes of these interview techniques revolve around the structure of the interview. Other themes common to advice on interview technique include issues of sampling, piloting, communication during interview, interviewer training and the effects of the interviewer on the interview process.

All these issues and skills need to be considered but the last, the effects of the interviewer on the interview process, requires special consideration. Here feminist ethnographers have made important contributions to the debate about effective interview practice (Anderson and Jack, 1991; Borland, 1991; Stacey 1991). For Judith Stacey feminist principles of empathy, connection and contextual knowledge which appear to indicate that "ethnography [is] particularly appropriate to feminist research" are in fact compromised by ethnographic research. She states, "I find myself wondering whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation" (1991: 113). Stacey considers both research process and product to be dangerously exploitative. Research process exploits because it involves "inequality and potential treacherousness". The researcher intrudes into the object of research, and is free to leave at any time while the "lives, loves and tragedies" of the researched are "grist for the ethnographic mill, a mill that has a truly grinding power". The product is exploitative because despite the collaboration of researcher and researched in the research process, "in the last instance, an ethnography is a written document structured primarily by a researcher's purposes, offering a researcher's interpretations, registered in a researcher's voice" (1991: 113-4). The response to this critique must recognise the validity of possible treachery and inevitable interpretation. However, the honest approach to interviewing, outlined above, involves the explicit statement of intentions to the subjects of research and while they may wish to

control certain conclusions respondents are not so naive as to assume that their conclusions will become mine.

A more problematic critique of the research product is offered by Katherine Borland in “That’s Not What I Said’: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research” (1991). Her analysis of folklore highlights the fact that even using a recorded interview there is no “original” narrative, merely representations of that narrative. For, though Borland is not explicit about this point, even the context of making and presenting interviews provides the groundwork of a representation. Borland is quite clear, however, when she states that “to refrain from interpretation by letting the subjects speak for themselves seems to me an unsatisfactory if not illusory solution” (1991: 64). There will always be an element of interpretation of respondent data which will mean those very respondents can challenge the use of their statements with “that’s not what I said” or, at least I would add, “that’s not what I meant”. The integrity of the researcher cannot be measured against this challenge, though the researcher’s conclusions may be. That is to say, my preface to questionnaires and interviews, which declares my intentions to use the respondent’s data in a thesis on New Age spiritualities, cannot be expected to explain *how* I shall use this data. My conclusions, or representations, can be “legitimately challenged by those for and about whom” (Borland, 1991: 64) I have written. Thus my interpretive authority is rightfully to be questioned. But such reflexive questioning is intrinsic to

my project as I seek to make a representation that the “natives” will recognise, even if they do not fully concur with its details.

4.2 RESEARCH PROCESS: INSIDE THE WEB

4.2.1 Sources

The selection of sources for my research posed considerable problems. I intended my findings to be at least in some ways generalisable, though I always recognised that my conclusions would be ideographic in nature. Nevertheless, the validity of general statements is largely measured by quantitative means, whereas my research is primarily qualitative. Thus, when using my fieldwork alone as the basis for claims about New Age spiritualities in general, each proposition carries the rider that it is indicative rather than conclusive. I had to establish certain parameters to ensure that my research was substantive and richly informative. The two key guidelines I developed were geographic and specific. The first limited my survey, eminently practically, to my local environs, the West of England. The second may be considered a borehole approach in that depth and specificity provides sufficient detail to exemplify a theoretical framework as well as extend that framework. Since I had no illusions regarding testing my hypotheses in a scientific quantitative manner I allowed myself to select areas that would be rich resources for illustrative detail. By magnifying a specific site, such as that of a New Age workshop like the “Unveiling the Goddess” seminar (see below), I

would be able to qualify the models and theories I had developed with concrete examples, albeit from a comparatively small sample and fieldwork experience. Yet my category of sufficiency, to sustain or refute my hypotheses, demanded wider and more statistically significant surveys than individual workshops. This reason, *inter alia*, meant *The Spark* newspaper represented an excellent balance as I was able to obtain more responses to my initial questionnaire and a greater breadth of respondents. The same reasoning supported the research into *Psychology of Vision*, to work from a larger sample and over a more extended period.¹

The geographic location of my research established practical parameters which required my research sites to conform to the regulation that they should have a base in the counties commonly defined as the West of England - Dorset, Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire. However, one of the features of modernity is the transience of the population, and it quickly became clear that it would not be possible to limit the individuals to the South West, at least in the questionnaire survey. This latter was especially the case in using workshops as a basis for studies because the workshops are advertised in nationally distributed publications such as *Caduceus* and *Kindred Spirit*.

¹ Originally I had planned to use another broader source for evidence, *The Life Foundation School Of Therapeutics*, which represented a specific formation of a New Age "religion" but gaining access to LFST proved too complex and problematic.

While the two guidelines of geography and specific New Age groups were my preliminary foundations there were many other controlling factors in the selection of my sources, some intended, others unforeseeable. The chronological sequence of the research was often a product of chance or others' timetables, just as the final choice of New Age groups was determined in part by serendipity. That is not to say that my planning, in terms of proposals for the research and knowledge of the field, did not prepare me to seize opportunities as they arose, merely that in any fieldwork there is a considerable element of luck as one is subject to the desires, foibles and influences of other people who are outside the researcher's control.

It is not possible even to assert a chronological sequence whereby my research focused on one source then another, for the pragmatics of fieldwork meant that research into each of the sources was contiguous and overlapping. From early on in my review of the literature I began to develop the model of web-like interactions as an alternative and more accurate model for those involved in New Age spiritualities than the models presented in most of the secondary literature. Yet as an epistemological model, I had already conceived of the necessity to define knowledge and concepts in terms of interdependence, interconnections and context. This preconception influenced my choice of source. One of the most important nodes of interconnectivity in alternative approaches to healing, business, and New Age spiritualities is to be found in free local newspapers. These newspapers are network

hubs for information and contact links for local New Age groups. The two most significant in the West Country, because of their distribution, are *The Spark* and *Southwest Connection*. Thus my selection of a free newspaper was based on the rational conclusion that their readers would be representative of those involved in New Age spiritualities and that the newspaper itself would be illustrative of the web model. However, it was by chance, that at the time I was making this decision and considering how I might contact the readership of either publication, I saw a readers' survey printed in *The Spark*. Contacting the editor provided a gateway to the readership and also proved fruitful as he allowed me access to the raw data from their own "Readers' survey". In this way *The Spark* became my first source of data for research.

Chronologically the second source for my research, *Psychology of Vision*, was in fact gained through an earlier contact. I had become interested in a group based in North Wales as a possible source for research, *Life Foundation School of Therapeutics* (LFST), before I had chosen the limiting geographical rubric of the West. A colleague with whom I had been working in education inspired my knowledge of this group. She provided me with the initial information that allowed me to visit the group's international annual conference, held at the University of Wales, Bangor, July 23-27, 1997 and including 600 participants. Certain features of the group as a manifestation of a New Age religion were my primary interest. Participants of the conference practised the group's particular form of yoga, called *Dru-yoga* and followed a nominal

leader, Mansukh Patel, who is a second-generation Indian UK resident preaching a Gandhian message of peace. The teachings of the group are a hybrid of *advaita* Hindu philosophy, but framed in universalist terms. Participants included many from Holland, largely it seemed, a result of a popular television programme interview with Mansukh and a documentary on LFST. However, this source, which genuinely was my first participant-observation fieldwork, soon proved to be a dead-end. My interaction with senior members of the group indicated their keen sensitivity to how the group was portrayed and a determination to control this portrayal that would have compromised my integrity. My contact however, remained a rich resource despite this setback, for she became involved in *Psychology of Vision* and provided access to the second focal area of my research.

The issue of access is integral to social research methods (Hornsby-Smith, 1993: 52ff). The core themes of access in social research revolve around the ethics involved in observational studies. These themes, of overt or covert studies in the case of both closed and open access sources, define the boundaries of this aspect of research methods. My own adoption of an overt style in studying open access sources was largely unproblematic from an ethical perspective. If, as was the case with LFST, the source proved to be closed, I ended my study. An open and direct explanation of my own involvement as a sympathetic observer proved effective in gaining access to the three sources I settled on

researching, both with those controlling access and with the participants of the workshops.

In social research the key figures who enable access, and can be the basis of whether a project is successful or not, are known as “gatekeepers”. The three gatekeepers for my research sources shared a common interest in my project (once it had been explained to them) and a concomitant supportive approach to my research activity. Thus the editor of *The Spark*, John Dawson, provided me with the raw data from the survey carried out before my contact with the paper. When a further “readers’ survey” was published in the paper, on my suggestion he included a section where respondents could agree or disagree with the possibility of further contact about their views. This allowed me access to send my own questionnaires, and based on these I could conduct interviews. The questionnaires were designed to fold into an envelope after completion, and printed with a pre-paid stamp, courtesy of *The Spark*, which undoubtedly increased the respondent numbers. In return for this support I offered to write two articles for the paper using the topline survey results to describe spirituality in the West, in the journalistic house-style of *The Spark* (1998, 12:31; 1999, 17:32). The same kind of support was evident from my contact with *Psychology of Vision* who firstly provided me with information about the workshops, seminars and literature of the group and then allowed me reduced fee access to the workshops I attended. Finally, my contact distributed and collected a set of questionnaires at a workshop that I was unable to

attend through illness. The third contact, for the “Unveiling the Goddess” seminar, was made through a more tenuous set of links, but would have been an eminently useful source had not circumstances precluded the possibility of analysing the questionnaire responses and continuing the fieldwork through interviews. This gatekeeper was the man who ran the seminar, Roger Woolger, and his support included a reduced fee for the seminar as well as a keen interest in my research and provision of a number of his writings on New Age spiritualities. Unfortunately interpersonal frictions disrupted the weekend seminar and although I received a 56% return to my initial questionnaire, it seemed both the data garnered in this way and any follow-up interviews would have been adversely affected by the ruction. Despite such setbacks these realities of social research and the process of participant-observation have usefully informed my research experience.

4.2.2 Evidence

The four types of evidence obtained from each of the three sources are a variation and extension of David Silverman's “four methods” (outlined above): participant-observation in workshops and seminars; analysis of literature; questionnaire data; interviews. My aim of gathering sufficient data to substantially illustrate my hypotheses and fill out the web model led me to set basic targets about the quantity of responses necessary to justify the fieldwork. I considered 50-100 questionnaire responses in total, whatever the response rate, a valid selection of views to analyse. In fact I received 65 completed questionnaires, of which 60 are included

in the database. This represents a response rate of 50% for the single mailing to *The Spark* respondents, 58.7% from the participants of three *Psychology of Vision* workshops, and 56% from the “Unveiling the Goddess” seminar. The second target was to interview five respondents from each of the sources of investigation to obtain richer, deeper levels of information. Analysis of the literature produced by each organisation included *The Spark’s* publications, *Psychology of Vision’s* publications and course documents including the texts published by its initiator Chuck Spezzano, the documentation of *Woolger Training Seminars* and Roger Woolger’s other published material.

Having established these guidelines, it was necessary to design a questionnaire that would adequately fulfil criteria of reliability, validity and not least inform my project about the nature of New Age spiritualities. The first step in this procedure was to select an arbitrary sample from the first *The Spark* readers’ survey to pilot certain questions to be included in the questionnaire. Contiguous with this practical trial I explored other surveys related to the specific field of the New Age (Ferguson, 1980; Rose, 1996), and considered the entire nature of questionnaire construction (Mann, 1985; Newell, 1993).

The questionnaire was designed with multiple parameters in mind. Each parameter features in the construction and layout as much as in the syntax and grammar of the questions. While the overall project is focused on the expression of ideas, there were a number of very practical issues to solve in order to arrive at a substantive and

transparent exposition of the ideas. The rationale presented here is a fragment of the thinking and piloting process that went towards the construction of the final questionnaire. Having selected the sample or sources from which respondents should be taken, the parameters I had to consider in the construction of this questionnaire were of three types: questions about the nature of personal spiritualities and issues of inclusion/exclusion from the infinite possible questions; the structure of these questions; layout, distribution, collection, and fiscal issues. The final product was a questionnaire of thirty-five questions printed on A3 paper, which could be folded on itself in order to post without an envelope (see Appendix A).² The sequence of the questions and their emphasis is a result of both the hypotheses I had developed prior to the fieldwork and the responses to the trial questions, where I had discovered the necessity of greater clarity and sub-division of the questions. The questions are a mix of open and closed varieties depending on the nature of information required, but where possible I created space for respondents to develop their ideas or explain their responses. Broadly, the structure of questions follows this scheme:

Questions 1-8: Nature of spirituality, personal attitudes and practices.

Questions 9-14: Personal involvement with spiritual groups and effects on attitudes.

² I am indebted to Stuart Rose who allowed me to follow the design of his own highly successful questionnaire (1996).

Questions 15-19: Ideas about and attitudes to the concept of the New Age.

Questions 20-24: Personal, social and political evangelism.

Questions 25-28: Ideas about God and the millennium.

Questions 29-35: Networking and networks.

Additional information: Gender, age, income, and occupation.

Further to the grammatical structure and sequential layout of the questions each had to be coded in order to conform to a prescribed system for the purposes of data handling. The system I adopted, the database Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS, is the most commonly used programme for this kind of research (Procter, 1993: 239) and I was expertly advised on its use by Tony Hughes of the University of Bristol Computing Service.

Having gathered all the questionnaires and input the data into the SPSS package I was able to corroborate, refine and develop my hypotheses by establishing top-line figures and percentages for the responses, cross-tabulating questions, independent variables with significant variables, then elaborating these findings with further question and variable comparisons (see chapter 5).

A corollary process I undertook while handling these data was to formulate the basic outlines of questions to be asked in the in-depth interviews. I then created a controlled sample of the questionnaire

responses to contact for interview. This sample was selected on the basis first of the type of responses to the questions, then on the gender of the respondents. The former I judged according to the full completion of the questionnaire and the quality of responses given, the latter required a balance of male and female respondents, though I selected a 60% female, 40% male division as this corresponded to the gender split of the questionnaire responses. The limited size of the survey mitigated against further selection on the basis of independent variables of age, income and relationship status.

I was concerned that following my selection process those whom I had chosen might not be willing or able to arrange a time for interview. In fact every one of those I contacted was immediately willing to take part in interviews. While this was extremely pleasing, it is likely that my process of selecting interviewees had predetermined this kind of response. I had chosen those already willing to share their beliefs by filling in my questionnaire and returning it. Furthermore I had contacted only those who had included their name and address as available for future reference. And I had chosen those who were most articulate and expressive in their responses. Cross-referencing the occupations of this sample reveals a high percentage of people involved in communications on a professional level: two full-time teachers; two practising psychotherapists; one part-time writer. This represents 50% of the group, while a further interviewee had been a teacher in the recent past. Thus only four of the ten were not professionally trained to communicate

- they list their occupations as unemployed, interior decorator, event organiser and postman.

A number of specific skills were required in the process of interviewing which were essential if the subjects were to be expressive and explicit about their beliefs. I always allowed the interviewees to select the place for interview, and all except one chose to be interviewed in their own homes. This meant that the interviewees were relaxed and confident about their surroundings; it also followed that a certain amount of time was created for an introductory "settling chat", while tea was being made, which further set the respondents at their ease. Although the fact that the interviews were tape-recorded caused some comment from a number of the respondents, it became clear that all quickly forgot about the intruding machine. They understood that there was no cause for future embarrassment as I had also previously informed them that all interviews were confidential.

There are many other techniques necessary to ensure a successful interview (Phillips, 1971: 29-36; Minister, 1991). While it is possible to employ skills that engender rich responses, including open body language, eye contact, supportive response and the overall sense of the interviewer being present and interested, again some variables cannot be controlled. In one case the interviewee was only able to offer a short interview time (45 minutes) because he was looking after two aged parents alone. It is the nature of qualitative evidence and ethnography

that the contingencies of the field are an intrinsic aspect of the study's findings.

4.2.3 Analysis

There were three levels of analysis of the research data. The first related to the information obtained by the questionnaire survey. These data were useful to describe the general interests of those engaged with New Age spiritualities. The data could also be used to delineate the specific beliefs and practices of each of the two samples, *The Spark* and *Psychology of Vision*. Data on two distinct samples allowed for a comparative analysis by which I could refine general hypotheses on New Age spiritualities. The second level of analysis was developed from observations and experiences I had made whilst attending workshops/seminars and studying the literature from the organisations. This area of analysis created a more differentiated set of data on each of the researched groups. The final level of analysis related to the interview data. The information yielded in this aspect of the research was directly pertinent to descriptions of the particular researched group, and to New Age spiritualities in general. I was, however, most interested in investigating the specificities of individual belief and praxis. At this deepest level of research, the individual morphologies of spirituality were microcosms of the webs of belief and practice that are to be found in the macrocosmic network of New Age spiritualities.

Within the first level, of analysing the questionnaire data, there were three further distinct layers of analysis following the collection of data, its coding and input on the SPSS package. It was easy to discover topline percentages and frequencies for responses to individual questions requiring yes/no types of answers. Topline results are the first layer of analysis and can be considered relatively raw data. These data present statistical information on responses to each question that provide some general tendencies, but require an interpretive framework of the context of the response in order to obtain richer descriptions. However, long, detailed written responses could not be included in this method of data handling. It was thus important to carefully code individual responses to questions involving explanations (notably questions 3, 17-19, 22 and 34), so that I could return to them to investigate the opinions of the respondents at greater depth. Equally straightforward was the third layer of analysis: the cross-tabulation of responses by which it was possible to consider the relationship between certain kinds of responses and beliefs. This relationship could be seen, for example, between attitudes and means of sharing information (questions 34-35) and involvement with pressure groups or alternative political organisations (question 23). It was also possible to discover the overall tendencies of, for example, involvement in workshops (questions 9,10) and key categories of personal spiritual beliefs (question 25), where there were multiple possible responses on the questionnaire by tabulating frequency tables. A more laborious task was that of organising details where the respondent could list their own categories, such as influences on their

beliefs (question 29). Only the most relevant portion of the statistics and information produced by this survey has been used in this study - the database is a useful resource for further analysis.

The second level of analysis involved the participant-observation method of attending workshops and the study of the literature produced by the relevant organisations. My purpose in these inquiries was to define the place of each organisation in the web of New Age spiritualities and to discover the emphases of belief held by each organisation and its constituent participants. This level of analysis, in terms of the fieldwork alone, was predominantly a descriptive process. That is, I sought to "bracket out" any preconceived conceptual typologies or categories and define the key components of each of the research groups as they themselves did. Thus while I had a preconceived notion of a structure of interacting webs (which I also attempted to bracket out), the detail of the strands of concepts and practices, the content, was not preconfigured. I intended these descriptions to meet my criteria of accuracy, by presenting a model recognisable to insiders, and utility, by linking the specific details to the generic model of the web.

The third layer of analysis related to the interviews. I had adopted a "focused" approach for the interviews, to follow a comparable structure and set of questions. However, the act of interviewing often slightly shifted this outline, as the interviewees would unconsciously answer some of my questions differently from the order my interview sheet had been organised. Furthermore, certain of the questions I had decided

upon before conducting any interviews proved, after one or two formal uses, to be counter-productive. These questions tended to be more generally theoretical rather than personal and biographical. Their effect was to interrupt the thinking of the interviewee who then appeared to be confused about the nature of the interview. Nevertheless, replaying and transcribing the recordings was facilitated by the logical sequence of questions. The long interviews, most more than two hours, included considerable detail, much of which, like the questionnaire material cannot appropriately be included in this study. I selected information that illuminated and developed my core foci of the web model and the hypotheses about the diverse nature of New Age spiritualities.

Thus the methods of my study and the material that emerged from the fieldwork are “bootstrapped” to the methodology. This does not represent the closure of seeking only that evidence which supports my hypotheses, a crass verificationism, rather it is the honest presentation of methods founded upon theory. My analyses are a response to the ideas I have developed both in theoretical research and fieldwork research. My conclusions arise out of their own complex web of foundational formulations. In other words, one has to go beyond Helen Thorne’s “synthesis of methods” and recognise that social research is equally entwined with hermeneutics; conclusions arise both from methods used in a study and the theoretical formulations (methodology) that informed the adoption of specific methods.

PART III

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATIONS

CHAPTER 5

HOW THE WEBS ARE WOVEN

The material foundations of society, space and time are being transformed, organised around the space of flows and timeless time. ... dominant functions are organised in networks pertaining to a space of flows that links them up around the world. (Castells, 1996: 476)

A person who has reached the point in life where they realise 'being separate' doesn't work. That the whole planet - for healing - needs to connect to everything through their heart and love. (SS 2.22 on the meaning of spirituality).

In my view, the New Age is neither a movement nor a religion set apart from others. It is not something one can choose or not to join. It is essentially a view of the time we live in and the world we are creating. It is therefore for everyone. (Peter Donebauer, preface to Bloom, 1991: xiii)

5.1 TOPLINE RESULTS

5.1.1 Surveys and Typologies

The "Survey of Spirituality" questionnaire (Appendix A) elicited a wide variety of responses, as would be expected from a diverse collection of respondents. In some studies there have been considerable analyses of the socio-economic and geographic distribution of the individuals involved in New Age practices (Rose: 1996, 1998). It is not a part of this research project to repeat the detailed socio-demographic characterisation that broader surveys have defined. However, there is a place to describe the key features, through topline results, of New Age

spiritualities in the West of England. The sources of the statistics for this study are derived from two nodes of the web of spiritualities: *The Spark* and *Psychology of Vision*.

The value of presenting topline results is analogous to the creation of a topological map: the topology of the London Underground for example is instantly recognisable and yields extremely reliable and useful information about the flows and directions of the underground trains between the multiple nodes of the station network. Yet, despite this explanatory value, it is a guide that cannot convey the almost ceaseless movement of trains and passengers under the ground. Millions of individuals leave unique trails as they pursue their interests and duties within this framework, utilising the system and the topological map of it to their own ends. The overview provided by topology has strictly limited parameters, just as does the exposition of topline survey results. If we are to discover wider ramifications and meanings we require other tools and methods. The meaning of statistical summaries is developed in this thesis by a deeper and more detailed archaeological analysis of the individual constituents of the network. Just as there are many layers to comprehending the underground network - from timetables to rolling stock to strategic considerations on staffing and issues of safety - so there are manifold variables in the web of New Age spiritualities.

Nevertheless, it is useful to begin with the purview allowed by topline topology before descending into the complex world of practices and beliefs which structures the web. "On an energetic level", to adopt a

phrase employed by many within the New Age network to refer to unseen interests, motivations, inclinations and spiritual strength (which some claim to see in auras), there is much more to the interaction of practice and spiritual experience than can be materially measurable.

The most detailed analysis of statistical data about the individuals involved with New Age practices is that carried out by Stuart Rose (1998). (Useful anecdotal descriptions of New Agers in the UK can be found in Chryssides, 1999: 320-332, Sutcliffe, 2000: 17-36, and of New Agers in the US in Brown, 1992: 87-96). It is worth using comparable statistical outlines (cf Rose) of the core details of this group in order to delineate the different kinds of people who constitute the social foundations of New Age spiritualities by comparing these results with those obtained in my research sample. An important consequence of adopting this approach is to define and differentiate some social themes about those interested and involved in New Age spiritualities. The utility of taking this step is to provide a preliminary perspective on the social grouping of New Age spiritual seekers. But these points will only be topological in nature: ideographic rather than nomothetic. For it is not my intent to derive a psychological profile of character type or sociological ideal type from the data. These are reductive strategies that pertain to monolithic and homogenising modes of knowledge. Such typologies are opposed to the diverse epistemic model of *différence* that more accurately reflects the postmodern discourse of individually elected affinities (to adapt Goethe's phrasing for human relationships). That is to

say, the notion of ideal types derives from a modernist perspective which concentrates on commonality and essences which is quite different from Foucault's discourse of fractures and heterogeneity, which itself reflects the praxis of postmodern society. It is out of this novel *bricolage* that the twentieth and twenty-first century spiritual seekers develop their singular pathways of practices and beliefs, contrary to the closure of scholarly categories and ideal types.

5.1.2 Gender Issues

The construction of individual identity by adopting personalised ideologies, belief systems and a variety of practices is a central theme within the eclecticism of those within New Age spiritualities. But a significant preliminary step, from an etic perspective at least, in the *description* of how such identities are constructed is to consider the gender balance of those engaged with New Age spiritualities. The comparative statistics used below are taken from Stuart Rose's research discussed in "An Examination of the New Age Movement: Who is Involved and What Constitutes its Spirituality?" (1998: 5-22)

Figure 1. Gender Balance of New Agers¹

	Rose	Corrywright	National
	%	%	Pop. Av.
			%
Female	70	60	51
Male	30	40	49

The national figures for male/female population distribution show almost parity in numbers of men and women. Yet it is clear from the statistics in figure 1 that there is a gender imbalance of those involved with the New Age, with women signally greater in number. Rose rightly attributes this primarily to the corespondent growth of the women's movement with the development of the broader penumbra of the New Age (1998: 6). Marilyn Ferguson also highlights the role of feminism in the increased interest of women for New Age practices. Ferguson takes the biologically essentialist position that "women are neurologically more flexible than men" (1980: 226) as a basis for her assertion that as women enlarge their influence in formerly male preserves and engage with patriarchal systems the result will not be simple assimilation of old systems, but the creation of new fields of human activity. Thus she cites Lou Harris of Harris Poll as support, "that women are far ahead of men in pushing for basic human qualities" (227). These "basic human qualities" Ferguson finds in the extraordinary growth of New Age organisations and practices. It is the "power of women" to make these changes and extend

¹ Rose's figures are derived from a sample size of 908 (1998). National figures are taken from Rose's 1998 study, derived from M. J. Waterson 1993.

the boundaries of spiritual activity, so “for example, one third of the founding members of a new holistic medical organisation were women compared to the percentage of women physicians in the United States (8.3 percent)” (228).

Yet, despite this movement toward increased influence and involvement there are many aspects to New Age spiritualities that retain patriarchal and male-dominated structures. Elizabeth Puttick's recent work on women in NRMs has been critical in bringing forth evidence about the recalcitrantly hegemonic structures of patriarchy in many NRMs and the consequent abuses by men within these traditions (1997, 1999).² However, Puttick points out that since the mid-1980s:

In some NRMs, particularly the counter-cultural variety, women may be liberated, empowered and fulfilled. Women are more numerous in this kind of NRM, and may outnumber men by as much as 2 to 1. This is the case in the Osho movement, the Brahma Kumaris, many Wiccan, goddess-worshipping and Pagan groups (1999: 144-5).

The appropriate question consequent to Puttick's analysis is whether the same dynamics have influenced the numbers of women involved with New Age spiritualities. Certainly my results and those of Rose support such a hypothesis. The ratio of women to men is slightly above 2:1 according to Rose and somewhat below using my results. Variances

² Puttick states that “the position of women in religion is paradoxical. On the one hand they are the primary ‘consumers’ of religion who fill the churches, keep the ritual fire burning, venerate and adorn statues of divinities. On the other hand, in most of the worlds’ religions they are debarred from playing an active role” (1999: 143). While this is less true of New Age spiritualities, those wider aspects of the web which include especially Asian religions and their enculturated versions in America and Europe, still retain at least vestigial elements of notions of the spiritual inferiority of women (143-4).

between the results are sufficiently close to substantiate the simple assertion that women outnumber men in New Age spiritualities. Malcolm Hamilton's 1990 survey of 400 participants at the Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit is equally supportive with 63% of those surveyed being women (2000: 199).

However, it is worth distinguishing at this point between the claim that New Agers are *predominantly* female and the claim that women form a *significant majority* within the New Age spiritualities. Rose's results would appear to support the former claim, but his statistics are solely derived from the readership of *Kindred Spirit*. Rose concedes in a footnote that "readership as a *genre* demonstrates a female bias" and mediates his figures by the statement of "significantly higher incidence of female participants" (1998: 20). It is important to identify this interpretative difference here to clarify a preliminary assumption which arises from the numerical significance of women in New Age spiritualities: women are an important majority in New Age spiritualities whose interests undoubtedly influence the existence and continuance of many parts of the web of spiritualities. Nevertheless, it will be recognised, this is not the same proposition as the statement that New Age spiritualities are no more than women's spiritualities by dint of the overwhelming numbers of women within New Age.

The difference between the two statements above can be usefully illustrated by reference to Hamilton's study of those whom he loosely defines as being involved in "alternative activities". These activities he

defines as: "use of therapies; health magazines; human potential groups; human potential magazines, sects and cults, Green" (2000: 196). Clearly each category requires refinement for a detailed analysis of what these activities or practices may in fact constitute, but Hamilton's survey results indicate some valid themes for the issues of divergent and convergent interests between each gender group. Throughout Hamilton's sample women's responses show that they are much more likely to be involved in alternative activities than men. Women are, however, less likely to be interested in cults and sects.³ Visitors to the 1990 Mind-Body-Spirit Festival were asked whether they used or were involved with each of the categories, though Hamilton's method for establishing degree of "involvement" was based on a single positive response to a range of therapies and magazines listed on a card. Hamilton's figures, given in percentages with women the first figure, men the second, are use of therapies- 89/76; Health magazines - 65/49; Human potential groups -51/39; Human potential magazines -71/63; sects and cults - 14/24; Green 65/59 (Hamilton, 2000: 196). These figures show the greatest disparities between gender groups in the use of therapies and health magazines.

³ It may be pertinent to relate this fact which represents a genuine wariness amongst women about becoming involved with religious groups identifiable as sects or cults to Puttick's research on the predominantly patriarchal structures of many NRMs (1999). If a part of the interest in New Age spiritualities is for participants to give individual voice to their deepest spiritual motivations, it should not be any wonder that many women defer from joining another social organisation that yet again demands subjugation and silence.

Out of these statistics and analyses we may derive certain conclusions: women are undoubtedly a driving force in the establishment and existence of many of the nodes of the New Age spiritualities; the web of New Age spiritualities is crucially sustained by the individual and collective weavings of women and this is particularly evident in healing and therapies; although women outnumber men in most interest areas related to New Age spiritualities, men are a significant minority.⁴

5.1.3 Age Issues

A second feature of a general socio-demographic profile relates to the age range of New Agers. Susan Love Brown, in discussing the emergence and influence of New Age in America, defines New Age as a religion that is dominated by "baby boomers":

There is a generational aspect to New Age religion in the United States without which the extent of its influence and the nature of societal change cannot be understood ... New Age religion is one manifestation of a change in American character that began in the Sixties and is now reaching fruition (1992: 87).

While a distinctly recognisable generation post the second World War is less evident in the UK (either in a numerical birth boom or in the cultural explosion that excess capital afforded individual Americans in the 1950's and 1960's), there are similar features of generational interest in New

⁴ These comments relate to the *participants* of New Age organisations, events and practices, not to the *leaders* or *convenors* of these events. Rose uses his figures listing the top 37 teachers within New Age thinking to show that "in the mid 1990's, among important teachers, women are still outnumbered two to one by their male counterparts". Nevertheless, Rose notes, this is a "seven-fold increase between 1977 and 1994" (1998: 7).

Age activities. The statistics below highlight this point where the national average figures show a quarter of the population to be between 35 and 55, the New Age spiritualities show 64% (Corrywright) to be within that age range.

Figure 2. Age Profiles

Age Group	Rose %	Corrywright %	National %
Under 18	0	2	-
18-24	3	4	(under 24) 33
25-34	16	13	16
35-44	30	38	14
45-54	27	26	11
55-64	14	6	10
Over 65	10	11	16

Eileen Barker has usefully described the changing interests of this generation of 35-55 year olds in her analysis of the constitution of NRMs in England:

The emergence of a youth culture after the Second World War did not immediately translate into a new religious scene. Indeed, with a few exceptions such as young black males who became Rastafarians, the youth culture of the working class was and remains notable for its lack of religious manifestations ... Middle-class youth roughly followed the paths that their peers in North America were treading. It was not until the 1960's, toward the end of the period of militant student unrest, that a religious - or spiritual - alternative became visible to any but the few who were already involved in such an alternative. The demos faded into squats in the inner cities, into communes in sacred centres such as Glastonbury, and along the ley lines of the United Kingdom. Then the hippies started to move into more structured, but none the less religious or spiritual (rather than political) organisations - some of them of a strictly authoritarian nature. The dawning of the Age of Aquarius mingled into the Human Potential Movement, which has continued to flourish - reaching

into those parts of mainstream society from which other religions have been increasingly banished since the onset of a desacralisation of society. (1999: 22)

Barker's general sketch identifies two important themes in the consideration of age in New Age spiritualities. The first is the cultural dependence of the growth of New Age ideas on the specific historical circumstances that developed after World War Two. This would, however, seem to deny the important deeper historical roots to much of the thought and practices of New Age spiritualities (cf Alexander 1992; Melton, 1988; Tingay, 2000). Yet the New Age *qua* New Age Movement has a unique historical morphology and it is statistically undeniable that the majority of participants come from a single generation.

The second theme to which Barker implicitly refers is the consequent demise of New Age as an identifiable movement. Human mortality necessarily confirms such a hypothesis if age is the sole factor in determining the continued existence of a New Age Movement. J. Gordon Melton has a more refined perspective; he distinguishes between the historical elements that form foundations of much New Age *thought* and the present existence of a New Age *Movement*. Of the New Age thought he has written, "insofar as the New Age Movement represents primarily an updating of the long-standing occult and metaphysical tradition in American life, it has a bright future" (1988: 50). One might substitute "American life" here with "European" or "English" (whilst recognising markedly different histories). Of the New Age Movement Melton suggests, "as a movement, I believe, the days of the New Age are

numbered ... there are already strong indications that the New Age synthesis is crumbling" (51).⁵ The reasons he draws this conclusion are not, however, age related. In fact he suggests a vibrancy and expansion in this area: "unlike the older forms of the community in previous decades, the movement has been able to penetrate and even develop its largest constituency from single young upwardly mobile urban adults" (50 ff). Melton's analysis of the decline focuses on changing beliefs and cultural circumstances that are leading to a fragmentation of the New Age Movement.⁶ It is worth recollecting that the definition of New Age I have adopted for this study avoids the notion of an integrated movement. I have developed a pluralist conception of spiritualities, however diverse the beliefs within the whole may be defined, of which the fragmentation described by Melton is in fact an intrinsic feature. Yet my understanding of New Age spiritualities must account in some way for the uneven age range of New Age participants which by no means reflects the normative scale of the national figures.

Certainly Barker's sketched outline and Brown's baby-boomers hypothesis fit a basic typology of New Ager. Those who are now between the ages of 35 and 55, i.e. born in the period 1945-1965, have grown and matured in a cultural transformation unlike any other in the

⁵ Written in 1988, Melton's analysis is too old to count as current evidence. However, since he does not say how many "days are numbered" in the proposed demise of the New Age Movement, it is impossible to substantiate his hypothesis. At the time of writing this thesis, New Age, *qua* "Movement" in Melton's terms, is expanding rather than contracting or crumbling.

⁶ Melton's analysis of the decline of the New Age Movement is itself analysed in chapter 8.

history of human activity. There has been a globalisation of economies and cultures, a growth in influence of a trans-national paradigm of scientific rationality and an explosion of technologies that have become hegemonic as ideal solutions to major problems. Aligned with this revolution in products, and product availability for the small numbers of the wealthy in the world, a postmodern critique of epistemology has emerged which relativises, historicises and engages with a world of infinite specificities. That is, paradoxically, the success of what Lyotard has termed "instrumental reason" which has a linear trajectory has also seen the emergence of a differentiated web of worldviews. New Age spiritualities are products of these twin forces, of homogenisation and fragmentation. The individuals most affected by these streams of thought and most able to respond to them on a practical level (they have juridical allowances, financial freedoms and intellectual maturity) are those now between the age of 35 and 55. This hypothesis assumes that as those born in the 1970's and 1980's reach the age of 35 the process will be perpetuated. It is debatable whether the statistics support such a conjecture. Though indeed the next most significant age range after 35-44 and 45-54 is that of 25-34 (13% - Corrywright). Only future research will establish the verity of either hypothesis, on the decline or future continuation of the New Age spiritualities.

But perhaps it is truer merely to recognise the dimension of change in history and state that New Age spiritualities are as much subject to Heraclitean flux as any of the religions. So, for example, Christianity

today has changed from the small movement which began an evangelical ministry in the decades and early centuries after Christ's death, while on the other hand the formerly dominant Mystery religions of Ancient Greece have disappeared, leaving few traces.

5.1.4 Financial Issues

One of the common identifications of those engaged with New Age spiritualities is related to wealth (Melton for example, refers to New Agers as “an affluent social group” - 1988: 51). The assumption is that given the expense of many of the courses and workshops, and some of them are expensive, only the relatively wealthy can generally be affiliated with New Age organisations or activities. Yet statistics indicate that earning levels are on a par with national levels in England

Figure 3. Income Levels

	Rose	Corrywright	National
	%	%	%
Under £5000	19	20	17
£5000-£9999	21	15	33
£10,000-£14,999	18	8	23
£15,000-£19,999	16	7	13
£20,000-£29,999	14	13	9
Over £30,000	7	12	5
No answer	5	25 ⁷	-

⁷ This anomaly in the feedback from my questionnaire begs certain questions about fieldwork - both quantitative and qualitative. Large-scale surveys are not often corroborated by independent evidence, thus any of the responses regarding income levels should be open to question. I can only make suppositions about the wary nature of my respondents on this question: it could be that some considered the question irrelevant on a questionnaire ostensibly about spirituality; privacy about these matters has a high premium in this country; embarrassment for either earning too little or too much may also have had a role in some people's silence.

If the sources for statements regarding affluence are taken merely from workshops and seminars, there is no doubt that New Agers would appear to be an affluent section of society. 48% of the *Psychology of Vision* sample declared earnings of over £20,000 (considerably above the national average wage). In the area of training seminars, the practitioners of New Age spiritualities are composed of a high proportion of the wealthy middle classes. Yet this is by no means the only mode of practice and engagement by the individuals interested in New Age teachings. The web is considerably more disparate and allows for multiple networking methods beyond the fee-paid course. While courses are largely an exclusive domain for the more wealthy sections of the population, the same *Psychology of Vision* sample includes 24% whose declared income is below £5,000 (lower than both Rose's and national figures). The reason for this is that courses are often offered at a subsidy for the unemployed and low waged. Participation on such courses is not, therefore, an accurate method of testing the wealth of New Agers. Broader surveys, such as Rose's statistically significant study of over 900 individuals, or those that include results from other sources, such as my study, using a free newspaper, elicit truer results.

Stuart Rose concludes from his data that "only three facts stand out prominently": "first, almost without exception, participants are middle class"; "secondly, almost three-quarters of the New Age population are women" (a figure we would need to ameliorate to nearer two-thirds); and "thirdly, over half are middle-aged" (1998: 11). Clearly much more needs

to be written on the nature of the individuals who participate in and construct the web of New Age spiritualities. One way to achieve a thicker description is by continual quantitative surveys among specific organisations and on a wider social basis (useful examples of the latter are the LIFE poll conducted by NOP for Resurgence - 2000, 201: 6-9 - and the "Soul of Britain" survey conducted by the BBC for a programme of the same name - 2000). Another means of extending the description of those engaged with the beliefs and practices of New Age spiritualities is a deeper analysis of the responses generated by the questionnaire (see 5.2 below). A congruent method for establishing thick, rich and informative detail is through qualitative studies using in-depth interviews and observer-participant techniques as well as studying the literature of organisations (see chapters 6 and 7). In this way topology becomes topography as the details, the relief, of individual engagements are revealed. The perception of the phenomena changes also as the observer shifts from a top-down perspective and adopts an emic eye-to-the-ground stance to see individual webs evolving through the complexity of nodes within the network.

5.2 QUESTIONNAIRE ANALYSIS

5.2.1 The Nature of New Age Spiritualities

The preliminary questions of the "Survey of Spirituality" (questions 1-8) had a two-fold purpose: the first was to induct the respondent into the

general nature of the survey by reflecting on their own attitudes to basic questions relating to religion and spirituality. It is perhaps surprising for the academically inclined thinker to realise that this type of intellectual reflection is not a predisposition for many individuals; they do not question their beliefs in this way. The widespread use of psychological profiling and the identification of different types of approach to learning and working in Myers-Briggs style questionnaires should lead us to recollect that humans function in a variety of ways, and even on questions of belief there are multiple approaches to adopting ideas and practising within a belief system. Thus many that completed my questionnaire thanked me for the opportunity to consider certain of these fundamental questions pertaining to the difference between religion and spirituality and the wider issues of their personal practices. The second purpose of the initial section of the survey was to identify the definitions of spirituality and religion amongst the researched community. Lexical and scholarly definitions undoubtedly have a place in constructing these concepts, but use and currency amongst the wider cultural community may have a different slant. This hypothesis was borne out in the responses obtained.

While 88% of the sample considered themselves to be “a spiritual person”, a slightly lower figure of 70% considered themselves to be pursuing a spiritual path. This indicates the widespread ontological conception that to be human is to be spiritual. This survey cannot claim to adduce results that statistically confirm such general statements, but

the conclusions can be used to refine our theories and hypotheses about the nature of religiosity. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the secularisation hypothesis needs to be amended from the statement “that modernity is characterised by increasing secularisation of belief and by a corresponding increase in religious scepticism” (as defined by Gill, Hadaway and Marler, 1998: 507) to include the evidently widespread belief in the spiritual nature of human beings. Longitudinal research, cross-referencing quantitative data on religious belief in Britain from the 1930's to the present, carried out by Robin Gill, C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Marler, has concluded that there has been a “persistence of non-traditional beliefs” (for example, reincarnation, horoscopes and the exchange of messages with the dead). Their research claims that “a theoretical perspective is needed that recognises the often corrosive effects of modern life on the transmission of religious beliefs and the continued popularity of worldviews which presume a transcendent referent, however broadly defined” (1998: 507).

My thesis does not pretend to offer a theoretical perspective in response to the specific problem defined by Gill *et al.* However, the Foucauldian and feminist critiques of knowledge given in chapter 2 allow a framework for understanding how a fragmentation of religion, and a synthesis of spirituality or “transcendent referent”, may be conceived from a postmodern perspective. Both trends are existent in the current morphology of religious ideas and practices.

The important issue arising from the survey respondents self definition as spiritual beings is how they understood the term "spirituality". It was for this reason that question 3 gave space for a long response and was phrased carefully to allow personal definitions ("describe what you mean when you use the word spirituality"). My prior research had led me to the conclusion that the plurality of spiritual practices needed to be clearly posited in the generic category of New Age spiritualities. The responses to this particular question confirmed my supposition. The mode of appropriation and application of the term spirituality is akin to the linguistic, Wittgensteinian epithet that "meaning is use". The way this epithet works is famously expounded in Lewis Carroll's *Alice through the Looking-Glass*, referred to by Eric Sharpe as the "Humpty Dumpty principle":

'There's glory for you!' [said Humpty Dumpty]

'I don't know what you mean by "glory",' Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't - 'til I tell you. I meant, "There's a nice knock-down argument for you!"'

'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument",' Alice objected.

'When I use a word' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master - that's all.' (Quoted in Sharpe, 1983: 35)

In the survey 68% of the sample considered the essence of spirituality to be the same across traditions (the examples given in the question were, New Age spirituality, Buddhist spirituality and Christian spirituality), but 28% had decided that there are a variety of different types of spirituality. This should lead to the conclusion of spirituality conceived as a singular phenomenon. Yet the variety of definitions of spirituality given in question three and the multiplicity of ways in which spirituality is practised lead to a Humpty Dumpty understanding of many “masters” making the word “spirituality” mean many things. Thus, there were distinctly monotheistic definitions of spirituality such as “feeling God’s presence with us on earth” (SS 1.19) or, “awareness and communication between self and a higher being; relationship between one’s soul and God” (SS 2.2). These contrasted significantly with pantheist or panentheist conceptions of a more *advaitan* perspective,

A sense of oneness with everything, a sense of encompassing the totality/wholeness of all that is and beyond; expansiveness; the infinity of all; ever unfolding love. (SS 2.3)

A common theme and frequently used term was that of “connectedness” to God, other people and the planet. Concern for the planet, the influence of the ecology movement and deep ecology philosophy was evident in many individuals’ perceptions of spirituality:

An awareness of something more than our everyday reality - a sense of purpose, connectedness about our lives, what we experience. Also spiritual values e.g. compassion, love, trust and environmental awareness. (SS 1.1)

The idea of connection resonates as a core spiritual principle in many of the responses throughout the sample. E. M. Forster's phrase "only connect" is consciously adopted by many within the New Age spiritualities to affirm an ethical and spiritual stance of engagement with especially ecological activism and personal growth. Thus the twenty-five year anniversary edition of *Resurgence* is titled "Only Connect" and the editor's preface expounds a worldview which revolves around this theme:

Science connects with arts, matter with mind, body with spirit, nature with culture, individual with community, knowledge with wisdom and earth with heaven - forming the new trinity of Soil, Soul, Society and creating a sense of belonging to the earth community at large. (Kumar, 2000, 201: 3)

The conception of Satish Kumar of a "new" trinity is an attempt to move beyond the limited notion of a New Age movement that focuses merely on mind, body, spirit. Kumar considers the New Age trinity of Mind, Body, Spirit to be a welcome development from the "social trinity" of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, as the New Age has introduced a spiritual dimension. But, according to Kumar, "this only replaces one partial view with another. This personal trinity ignores the social reality and again leaves out the natural world" (2000, 200: 6).

While these are valid criticisms of some individuals and of some aspects of the New Age considered as a discrete movement, concerns with the social and natural world are evident throughout my questionnaire sample which is representative of a broader notion of New Age spiritualities. The

truth is that the New Age movement is often a useful fiction from which the "serious-minded" are able to dissociate themselves. My questionnaire sample, interviews and observations at many New Age events lead me to conclude that genuine concerns related to social justice and environmental degradation are widely prevalent amongst the diverse practitioners of the more expansive category of New Age spiritualities. Indeed, on an individual level, some of those involved in the more radical New Age practices of channelling, crystal healing and UFOlogy are equally radical in practising personal and planetary non-violence. There are, simply, many approaches and perspectives within the web of New Age spiritualities. Multifarious individual webs link and interlink to a greater or lesser extent with different ideologies or religious beliefs. It is for this reason that we might find New Agers whose understanding of spirituality is a limited personalist conception of Mind, Body and Spirit, as Satish Kumar suggests. But, equally we will find New Agers who are more rooted in a spirituality of Soil, Soul and Society going to the same conferences, events, bookshops and wholefood stores as the readers of *Resurgence*.

Some definitions from the questionnaire sample were little concerned with a theistic notion of relationship with a transcendent "other". One respondent opted for an aesthetic conception, "the drive in mankind to seek beauty, truth and goodness, and love" (SS 1.6 - influenced I suspect by Keats's famous "Ode on a Grecian Urn"). Another respondent considered the term purely from a single religious tradition, "for me,

spirituality means something to do with paganism/shamanism" (SS 1.5). There were also definitions which closely resembled Heelas's notion of New Age as Self-religions, "it means extending myself beyond my small self to connect with the universe" (SS 1.7). Certain explanations reflected the world-affirming eclecticism that forms a significant part, though by no means the whole, of New Age ideas about the soul:

We are each a perfect soul coming to earth many times to learn the lessons we need in order to become pure love and light and merge with the source. (SS 1.24)

Clearly the influences of traditional religions and NRMs perspectives on the soul or spirit have moulded many aspects of each individual's definitions. It is quite easy to recognise the Christian influences on monistic and theist definitions. It was also not surprising to discover the influence of Sai Baba's teachings on love on the thinking of the last respondent cited above.

The variety of influences from specific religious traditions and teachings that had affected the respondents considerably outnumbered the specific religious traditions of which they were members. Thus 80% of the sample defined at least one religious teaching or practice that influenced their spirituality, while only 27% claimed to be active members of a traditional religious group. This number can be expanded somewhat when we consider the response to the related question about whether the individual followed "a particular spiritual teacher or teaching", where 47% responded in the affirmative. The range of traditional religious groups cited by respondents is small when we consider the multicultural

range of Bristol residents (particularly pertaining to *The Spark* portion of the sample). The majority of those respondents who claimed to be affiliated to a religious group self-define simply as Christians, though some refer to their denomination - Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Quaker. This suggests that interest in New Age spiritualities in the South West of England is primarily a local formation which is receiving some support from members of organised religions, particularly Christians.

However, the majority of respondents did not define themselves as belonging to a specific traditional religious group and when we consider the influence of specific teachings (question 6), there is considerably greater diversity. Again the highest percentage of influential teachings emerge from Christianity. 37% of the sample affirmed Christian spiritual discipline as "the greatest influence" on their lives - though the teachings were variously cited in terms of specific denominations or elements of Christianity, such as Christ or the Bible. Of the 28 different teachers and teachings listed, other key influences include Buddhism, Yoga, Taoism, Hinduism and a variety of psychotechnologies from transformative dreamwork to transactional analysis and counselling. As a large proportion of the responses for the whole sample came from *Psychology of Vision* workshops, two other categories figured highly in this area, firstly *Psychology of Vision* literature and seminars and secondly, *A Course in Miracles*. The *Course* is often cited at *Psychology of Vision* seminars as useful reading for the perplexed, but it has been and

remains, widely used as a self-help manual amongst New Agers. (The prevalence of the *Course* is indicated by William Bloom's assertion in 1991 that, "it is thought by many to be the most powerful transformatory course currently available - 1991: 42.)⁸ A significant minority, one fifth of the research group, did not cite any specific religious teaching or teacher as influential in their own spirituality. Finally, the majority of respondents, 85%, considered there to be a clear difference between "being religious and being spiritual". Secularisation has undoubtedly brought about suspicion and antipathy to the idea of religion, but it has not led to a correspondent denial of what many consider the essence of the religions, spirituality.

It is worth further elaborating on the notions of spirituality and religion, in this section on "The nature of New Age spiritualities", by analysing the responses to the set of questions related to "ideas about and attitudes to the concept of the New Age" (15-19, cf 5.2.2). The questions in this section were developed in order to refine certain hypotheses about the New Age developed by academic outsiders. It also continued the theme of eliciting the understanding of the respondents regarding the nature of their beliefs.

⁸ *Course* is an influential series of daily lessons for the spiritual initiate published anonymously. They are known to have been transcribed between 1965 and 1973 by Helen Shucman who claims to have been an atheist of Jewish extraction when she was told by an inner voice to write notes on the thoughts arriving in her mind. She was thus a channel. But, as Riordan states, to a Christian rather than a Jewish spirit, "the text strongly implies that its source is the biblical Christ" (Riordan, 1992: 110).

The first hypothesis I sought to refine relates to the definition of New Age as a world-affirming system (as designated by Roy Wallis, 1984: 24-6). The survey group was asked whether they felt optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the planet. The response supported the general assertion with 57% of the sample indicating optimism. But it is necessary to mediate such generalisations, for 22% took a pessimistic view and 13% circled both positions. Clearly such a question lacks subtlety, but the indication is that not all following a spiritual path have a positive view about the future. In this limited sense not all within the New Age spiritualities can be considered world-affirming. Furthermore, there is considerable suspicion about technology and the material conditions on this planet. Some New Agers adopt the negative pathway and perceive the world as a "vale of tears" from which freedom is attained through repeated rebirths or "ascendance" to another planetary system such as Sirius or the Pleiades. Thus their views more closely resemble the world-rejecting type of Wallis's typology. Nevertheless, by far the majority of the sample can be construed as world-affirming as over three-quarters considered the world to be in the process of transformation and the majority of these were optimistic about the nature of that transformation.

Aspects of personal transformation were elicited in a prior question on the ways in which the ideas and practices that influenced personal spiritualities had positively affected or changed the respondents' lives. The most common responses were "happier", "more self-empowered", "more loving" and "more spiritual". A detailed exploration of the different

perceptions of transformation on a personal and global level was not the purpose of the questionnaire, albeit one element under general investigation. Question 18 which had been intended to bring out a limited quantity of relevant information on the New Age as a period of transformation, was not wholly successful in its aim. The reason for this was that some respondents understood the question to be asking for an alternative definition to the term "New Age" rather than the meaning and consequences of a New Age. Thus a typical response was "The Age of Aquarius. (Living Waters.) According to astrology" (SS 1.33). Many responses were more informative in indicating themes about the New Age as a period of transformation. On one level these ideas conformed to certain current ideas within the New Age spiritualities about an energetic level of existence; so for example one respondent suggested, "it's to do with a raising of Vibrations on the planet, therefore in us" (SS 2.14). On another level the idea of transformation was related to the *zeitgeist* of plurality and globalisation: "Acceptance of all traditions encouraging a holistic view - everything is connected and humanity can work to achieve a more successful future" (SS 2.16). The context of the respondents' definition within other responses given in the questionnaire plays an important part in the meaning of the belief they espouse. While the two former respondents were decidedly optimistic about future transformation (questions 15 and 16) the following definition of New Age as "caring about the planet as a whole - not being materialistic" (SS 1.11) is the consideration of a determinedly pessimistic thinker who nevertheless self-defines as New Age.

Question 17 related to the preferred self-designation of the respondents to the description of their views as "New Age". Responses to the question help refine the hypothesis relating the New Age to older ideas and beliefs. As we have already seen, acceptance of the title "New Age" depends largely on perceptions and definitions about New Age which vary from individual to individual. Some respondents took the view that New Age was "stone age" or a "resurgence of old ideas". This theme has resonances in the critiques of scholars like Robert Ellwood who states, "it is a common place that the New Age is not really new at all". Ellwood also claims that "more concretely, the New Age is a contemporary manifestation of a western alternative spirituality tradition going back at least to the Greco-Roman world" (1992: 59). This is a line of thinking which has been developed by Wouter Hanegraaff in his definition of New Age as a religion which emerges in the secular world as a novel form of western esotericism (1996). There is an undeniable validity in these assertions and in research which discovers the historical roots to phenomena, but in some ways such statements beg the question, for all human activity emerges from a historical background, yet is also a novel expression of its historical roots. An equally important area of research is the dynamic encounter of the old with the new, the organic shifting morphology of human cultural production. New Age spiritualities are "a modern approach to life. Non-conventional. Misunderstood. A variety of beliefs" (SS 1.28). More correctly, the New Age spiritualities are a disparate collection of the new and the old. They are, for one self-defined New Ager, "about the concept of Gaia and conservation" (SS

1.26). While for another respondent New Age spirituality is a contradictory amalgam:

On one level - a naive ideology which has more bearing on the ideas of a land of "milk and honey" than on the true state of the real world. - Being more positive - a readiness to be more open to more natural options (SS 1.12).

Another defines New Age simply as, "a revolt against traditional Christ based theology" (SS 2.5).

5.2.2 The Practice of Spirituality

If the premises for what each individual construes to be New Age and spiritual are so diverse, it is not surprising that the practices are equally varied. Yet despite multiple modes of understanding there are core and correlate themes by which we can identify a set of New Age spiritualities. The boundaries to this set are not so discrete for the New Age to be considered either as a religion or as a movement. However, if we conceive New Age spiritualities in terms of praxis rather than beliefs, that is, if we consider New Agers in the light of the way they practise their beliefs rather than what their beliefs are, we arrive at certain recognisable themes. The model for this mode of activity is the web.

The concept that New Age spiritualities are best considered as a web of praxis was partly developed before the construction of the questionnaire. It was affirmed, *inter alia*, by the responses to the set of questions on "ideas about God and the millennium" (25-28). The first of these questions listed seven areas of interest commonly considered to be at

the heart of New Age beliefs: channelling; healing and personal growth; ecology; eastern religions; New Age science; neo-Paganism; new psychology. Respondents could circle all categories or none if they wished. The highest affirmation was given to the area of healing and personal growth where 82% of the sample selected this category as an important part of their beliefs. Nevertheless, this figure also shows that 18% did not consider the area important for their beliefs. Eastern religions were only selected by 28% of the sample as important. Equally significant is the fact that only 33% of the entire sample selected new psychology as an important aspect of their beliefs when 42% of the sample were active in *Psychology of Vision* seminars and workshops. These results suggest that defining a core set of beliefs, even of the highest percentage categories such as healing and personal growth cannot completely define the field of New Age spiritualities. Attempts to create boundaries in this area of the study of religions, by defining essential beliefs, necessarily exclude significant portions of the wider group practising New Age spiritualities. We can simply conclude that there are practitioners of various beliefs whose networks interlink and interact in the pattern of many overlapping webs.

Two further questions from the questionnaire were included to examine this issue more deeply. The results serve to support the hypothesis that New Age defined as a religion in terms of a discrete set of beliefs is not an accurate measure for the field. The first question related to the notion of a God or Goddess. The issue of a theistic centre to religious

expression has an important history that needs briefly to be addressed before analysing the response to this question.

The history of the study of religions from Europe and America has been inscribed by the values of Christianity, the predominant religion of the West. Thus the many misconceptions and misunderstandings of world religions from nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnographers and scholars of religion may be isolated in conceptions derived from their understanding of Christianity. By relying on core Christian notions of what a religion included, research into and descriptions of the religions tended to focus on the notion of Godhead, the key differentiation of monotheism and polytheism, and, again using Christianity as the paradigm, the importance of the text. Difficulties for these scholars' definitions of religion arose when texts were not available or theistic concepts, as for Buddhism and Taoism, did not exist. Equally problematic for scholars were the multiple ways a given religion appeared to be practised by devotees that seemed to deny the validity of their attempts to express the essential nature of the religion. While Christianity appeared to assert a univocal self-understanding in the Bible and the Nicene Creed, a religion such as Hinduism was both a monistic tradition under the influence of Shankara and *Vedanta*, but also clearly polytheistic in many of the villages in India. Ninian Smart has sought to overcome these difficulties of defining essences by asserting "family resemblances" between the religions (1969). In his model familial characteristics relate ostensibly wholly different traditions through links

with mediate religious forms which share characteristics with those apparently unrelated. Wide variances between religious traditions can therefore be accounted for within a pluralistic set of heterogeneous religions. But it is only recently that scholars of religion have begun to apply a similar understanding *within* the religions themselves. Thus Rupert Gethin notes, "as is fashionable to point out these days, 'Buddhism' is something of an intellectual abstraction: in reality there is not one Buddhism but many Buddhisms" (1998: 2); and Gavin Flood defines a variety of Hinduisms in history, traditions, doctrines and practices (1996: 1-3; 5-7).

This pluralist conception within a religious tradition is congruent with the multiplicity of spiritualities emerging from the New Age. For while 58% of the Survey of Spirituality sample circled "yes" in response to the question "Is the idea of a God or Goddess important in your spirituality?", a highly significant proportion, 37%, circled "no". The conception of the New Age as predominantly theistic, which one might affirm from these figures, is further clouded by the results of the corollary question which elicited the ways in which respondents chose to refer to "this ultimate being". The range included traditional personified references to "almighty God", "God the Father" and "my Creator" and also "Mother/Father" and "The Goddess". More frequent reference was made to less defined notions of "God in a general way" which ranged from "Divine Source", "Universal Energy" and "Beautiful Spirit of Love" to "Fate", "Higher Mind", "Intelligence" and "Our Potential". Although many

within New Age spiritualities might claim these terms refer to the same essence, these multifarious labels mitigate against a unified theology or theology.

The second question designed to investigate the existence of central ideas which could be used to categorise New Age in terms of its religious beliefs was related to the significance of the millennium. As the survey was conducted in 1999, public consciousness of the millennium was high and the notion of change explicit in the idea of a New Age, and the related "Age of Aquarius", correlated with a current *zeitgeist* of excitement attached to the idea of the changing millennium. Only 15% of the sample considered the millennium significant. One respondent's comment perhaps represents a common understanding by those within the New Age spiritualities about the millennium, "heaven made for completely non-spiritual marketing types to help them make money" (SS 1.12 - a sales and marketing co-ordinator).

It is primarily by their practices that those within New Age spiritualities can be distinguished. In some ways this approach is analogous to the model developed by Ninian Smart which recognises the diversity of religious traditions in his notion of the seven dimensions of religions. (1989). The "doctrinal and philosophical dimension" is not thereby written out of our understanding of New Age spiritualities. Doctrine and belief are highly significant for many of the individuals and form the framework for individual nodes of the web. But for the generic category of New Age spiritualities it is the "practical or ritual dimension", the

“experiential and emotional dimension” and the “social and institutional dimension” which are of most use in defining New Age spiritualities, both for the insider and the outsider. Thus an important aspect of the Survey of Spirituality questionnaire was to inquire into the practices of the respondents (questions 9-12, “personal involvement with spiritual groups”).

Inevitably some of the questions and the responses overlapped. For example, question 11 asked whether the individual followed a “particular spiritual teacher or teaching” which may have repeated information garnered from questions 6 and 8 about whether respondents were members of a traditional religious group or followed a particular spiritual teaching. Nevertheless, many responses were elicited by question 11 that pointed toward diverse teachings and practices. The *Course in Miracles* figured highly, as did *Psychology of Vision* and Quakerism, especially amongst people from a Christian background. An important influence on a number of the psychotechnologies and self-help programmes is the “Twelve-Step Program” initiated by Alcoholics Anonymous (see Kelly, 1992: 150-1), which was also cited in response to question 11. Other teachers and teachings influencing specific practices for respondents included Nachman of Bratslav, Ignatius of Loyola, Mansukh Patel (of Life Foundation School of Therapeutics), Neem Baba and yoga.

The focal questions for personal engagement with spirituality were those concerned with how individuals pursued and developed their spiritual

paths and the frequency of involvement with public events. While it is reasonably clear to outsiders that a practice is engaged with when individuals commit to a specific religious group or take part in public events, it is much more difficult to measure personal and informal practices, especially if they include lifestyle choices. An example of an attempt at such a measurement is the LIFE poll conducted for *Resurgence* where the one thousand respondents were asked what they considered to be "the best way to protect the environment". 24% affirmed "public protest or personal action such as joining a campaign group" to be the best method, an option which is statistically measurable.⁹ However, 32% indicated their preference to boycott products which is significantly more difficult to measure. Thus refining or redefining Steve Bruce's notion of the New Age as "low impact and low salience" proves to be highly problematic. In fact if the growth in the availability of ethical products, from organic foods to ethical investments, is a sufficient criterion, there can be no doubt that some of the values of New Age spiritualities have a high impact. These conclusions depend upon the criteria for measurement. But it is very difficult to quantify practices such as prayer or meditation in order to arrive at conclusions related to impact and salience.

⁹ Even basic statistical analyses of number counting in organisations are problematic as Eileen Barker has shown in her analysis of the numerical significance of NRMs, because of issues of turnover, varying definitions of membership and double-counting (1999).

Respondents to the Survey of Spirituality could select from one of the following categories of involvement over the preceding twelve months: workshops, retreats, lectures, formal group meetings and festivals. The most active participants in formal public events (not affiliated with a specific religion), claimed to have visited or participated in up to thirty-two events (SS 1.1). Those who were members of religious groups often meet minimally once a week but also engaged with other public events. The active participants of New Age type events, those with financial and temporal freedom to become involved in these events, are the public faces of the New Age spiritualities. However, both this question and the preceding question in the questionnaire provided results that show considerable activity and engagement on a private level, alone and informally with groups of like-minded friends.

Figure 4 indicates quite clearly that the majority of those interested in New Age spiritualities are actively pursuing their interests primarily on a personal level. There is a significant core of slightly above a quarter who engage with public events in the forms of lectures, retreats, formally organised groups and, to a lesser extent, festivals. The key public focus of New Age spiritualities appears to be the workshop, from which many individuals derive spiritual sustenance, ideas and inspiration (see chapter 7). Highly significant proportions of the sample develop their spiritual path by informally meeting with friends or those of a like-mind and interest. The majority have developed practices which are carried

out alone (the details and nature of these practices are described in the following chapters using the in-depth interviews).

Figure 4. How Individuals Pursue Spiritual Paths

Workshops	Alone	Festivals	Lectures
58%	72%	18%	28%
Retreats	Formal groups	Informal Groups	
27%	28%	53%	

5.2.3 The Webs of Practice

The pathways that make up the web of each individual's spirituality in the New Age spiritualities are marked out not by formal organisations, but by a complex system of interacting, informal connections based on communication. It is in part for this reason that the image of the world photographed from space is a seminal symbol for many within the New Age spiritualities. The “global village” idea inspired by this image is a networking village. Indeed some popular reproductions of the “world from space” picture include satellites to enhance the notion of interconnectivity and global communication. An important aspect of the design of the Survey of Spirituality was to define in more detail the ways in which the webs were constructed. Thus a set of questions was

included to expand upon and refine the private and personalist aspect of New Age spiritualities (questions 20-24, "personal, social and political evangelism"), and another set of questions was directed at the explicit and implicit formation of networks (questions 29-35).

Over 85% of the sample considered it important, or had some need, to share personal spiritual beliefs (question 34), suggesting that core elements of the New Age spiritualities are fostering relationships and dissemination of ideas. The New Age spiritualities, in other words, are not a system of private individual ideologies. On this level at least the notion of community has an important role for many individuals. In fact, when in company of like-minded people, only 8% choose to remain quiet about their personal beliefs. The sharing of ideas is a vital component in the development of beliefs and in the establishment and maintenance of networks. On the issue of the methods by which individuals communicate there is a diversity of expression ranging from simply talking with others, adopted by the majority, to a selection of creative endeavours including writing, music, poetry, tutoring, counselling, gardening, through work and "in my being".

Undoubtedly an important influence on this set of creative and artistic pathways has been the widely prevalent idea that the development of the spiritual Self is a creative endeavour. Julia Cameron's extraordinarily successful book *The Artist's Way: A Course in Discovering and Recovering Your Creative Self* (1994) exemplifies the self-help style of many texts in this area. Cameron is both an important influence on the

trajectory of New Age spiritualities and has drawn upon vital strands in the wider web of spiritualities from Stanislav and Christina Grof's transpersonal psychology in *The Stormy Search for the Self* (1991) to Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* (1979).

The idea of creative work on the Self as a core to New Age spiritualities perhaps explains why 32% of the sample concurred with Heelas's description of the New Age movement as "Self-religions". However, 35% disagreed with the term. A further, equal proportion, either chose neither to agree nor disagree. A number of this group commented on the limited use of and therefore applicability of labels. Those who accepted the term Self-religion frequently qualified their acceptance by questioning the idea of Self and denying the egocentric conception of a selfish position. A respondent who rejected the term clarified her position by stating, "it begins with the self but it is not only about the self - it quickly becomes universal" (SS 2.16).

Active engagement with pressure groups and alternative political organisations is a significant sector of the web of practices for 44% of the sample. This high proportion of individuals supports the claim that New Age spiritualities include an ethical engagement with the wider community on a social and political level. The major organisations supported by the sample were Amnesty, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the Green Party, Charter 88, Oxfam, Christian Aid and local LETS schemes. In this way personal commitments and ideas of developing the Self become linked to universal, or global, issues, and

the web extends beyond the boundaries of a personal system. The choices that direct and create these web links are unique to the individual who makes them, but the structure that engages individual webs with larger webs is universal.

The methods of disseminating ideas and developing networks, it has been established so far, are largely through informal systems. This assertion does not, however, deny the significance of more formal links in the web. The key formal means of spreading ideas are the existence of active participatory workshops, the profusion of published works (see Appendix B) and to a lesser extent other media such as radio and television. Often informal contacts are the basis for more formal study or engagement with the wider web. Typically, an individual interested in New Age spiritualities will be told by a friend of the existence of a text or workshop. The link will thus be established and may remain no more than a tenuous acquaintance with a new idea or psychotechnology for example, or it may lead to the individual taking part in the workshop or buying the book, developing a deeper knowledge of the ideas or, in the case of self-help texts, following the course outlined therein. There are multiple levels of knowledge and engagement with the web of New Age spiritualities.

The last part of the Survey of Spirituality sought to clarify how communication is the substantive element of the links between nodes in the web. By defining the most effective modes of contact and eliciting the different styles of contact it became clear that informal systems of

communication underlay all the networks. The structure of dissemination of ideas within the New Age spiritualities is thus best defined as “bottom-up” rather than “top-down”. This contrasts with the mode of disseminating doctrine common in many of the traditional religions where organisations are more significant and network leaders operate from hierarchies whereby power emanates from the top. This is perhaps a simplified model of the operational functions of the traditional religions, but it is vitally pertinent in the perception of many of those within the New Age spiritualities. These individuals often consider traditional religions as archaic bureaucracies, and an important aspect of these New Ager’s beliefs is dependent on individual choice and personal authority. Such individual choice is itself dependent on structures that are segmented and polycentric, organisations that are multivocal, and systems that are reticulated by the word-of-mouth informal connections which are evident in New Age spiritualities.

CHAPTER 6

NODES IN THE WEB: *THE SPARK*

As the community that accepted the basic vision of the movement evolved, service organisations sprouted up to facilitate its development. Most important in any decentralised movement, periodicals tied the diverse groups and individuals together and kept the movement informed. (Melton, 1988: 43)

I'm not sure I want to go to a group ... I think it's best just to leave it alone and think what you think ... you have to be careful who you speak to otherwise people think you're barking mad. (SS 1.24)

The traditional spiritual thing is to do with having a teacher and somehow in modern times ... I think that's a very difficult thing ... with friends it's almost as if the roles can change so there's this kind of pupil teacher thing and it can free float around a group of people ... for a while I am that person's support and then it can go the other way. (SS 1.14)

6.1 THE SPARK

6.1.1 Communication and "Sharing"

The underlying structure of the web of New Age spiritualities is based on an informal system of interpersonal communications. Individuals discuss their personal practices and beliefs, report on workshops, festivals and training seminars to friends and colleagues. In this way the formal literature in the public sphere is mediated and multiplied by informal networks through a process of sharing. The notion of "sharing" has a particular resonance in the worldview of many within the New Age

spiritualities. Workshops and seminars that are given from a psychotechnological perspective explicitly support methodologies of self-examination through shared process. There is no novelty in expressing the fact that a crucial feature of all human networks is informal linguistic contact. It is, though, important to analyse the framework of concepts and mediations that constitute the specific language-game functioning in the web of New Age spiritualities. Individual identity and group identity are formed, in part, by an informal network of shared experiences which underlies and supports a formal network of the diffusion of ideas and doctrines through textual media and organised events.

Yet while group encounter and shared personal testimony in psychotherapeutic workshops are crucial dynamics of many New Age spiritualities, the investigation of the “higher Self” is ultimately deemed a matter of individual responsibility. In this way individual psycho-spiritual experience, the construction of personal identity, is reified to a realm beyond social norms where personal understanding is the absolute arbiter of the meaning and content of that experience. Thus authority has passed from external sources to the individual; there has been a process of democratisation whereby personal experience and judgement on spirituality has equal validity with that of, for example, published authorities. At this level the polycentric web is as many-headed as there are participants in the web.

The role of individual authority is usefully exemplified by the expression of one interviewee reflecting on his place within categories of religion.

First he described a "Burn your Inner Critic" workshop at Bath that was influential in his understanding of the way in which he adopted different practices, "my thinking changed into, if it works, try it, keep it; if it doesn't, let it go. I had a bad back and I went to acupuncture and Alexander technique and it worked. I don't have to know why" (SS 1.13). This rationalisation of an anti-intellectualist position is widely prevalent within the New Age spiritualities. And the authority that provides the ground for such decisions is personal experience and understanding. From this position it becomes quite feasible for the individual to assert a highly personalised spirituality, as did this interviewee when considering his religiosity in terms of a New Age:

if you mean New Age as opposed to old age or orthodox then I suppose it would have to be, but I think New Age itself has a meaning which perhaps doesn't include me ... whereas my spirituality is as fluid as my spirit ... The plethora of ideas is an environment where my personal ideas are far more acceptable to other people ... the atmosphere that surrounds the New Age is an atmosphere of freedom of expression and thought. For me it was about learning I had the power to choose ... In separating and becoming myself I gained a sense of my own power to create my own environment, religion. (SS 1.13)

This interviewee was a rare example from the sample whose opinions are strongly against the idea of sharing: "I won't discuss my personal spirituality with people who are not close friends because it's too personal. It's not a secret but it's a treasure". However, his espoused position on the notion of sharing his ideas contradicted the very activity he was taking a part in - sharing his ideas with me in the knowledge that this interview would form part of my research. His response when the

apparently obvious contradiction was pointed out was illuminating. The interview arose as a result of a questionnaire that was brought to his attention from *The Spark*, which he considered an implicit recommendation. This recommendation, and our informal talk on the telephone prior to the meeting, was sufficient to disclose his “treasure”. Thus, *The Spark*, though in the public and formal sphere of communication, mediates between the anonymous world of mass publishing and the local world of informal community networks and friendship webs.

6.1.2 Periodicals and the Web

The role of newspapers and related publications as vital nodes in the network of New Age spiritualities has been confirmed by one of the leading scholars investigating new religious phenomena, J. Gordon Melton. He has stated that the New Age movement, as with other similar decentralised organisations, is kept informed by periodicals, and given a sense of unity by these media (Melton, 1988: 43). The nature of the “periodical” as an artefact is changing rapidly in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century. Although there are many periodicals and journals printed in the UK relating to New Age phenomena (*The Spark*, *South West Connection*, *Resurgence*, *Caduceus*, *Kindred Spirit* to name but a few local and national publications),¹ there is an increasing dependence

¹ “There are now 26 New Awareness magazines distributed to the general public, and at least 100 more that cater to more specialist New Consciousness publics.” (Considine and Ferguson, 1994: 158.)

and use of internet publications as a networking resource. Indeed as Manuel Castells has asserted:

Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture. While the networking form of social organisation has existed in other times and spaces, the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure. (1996: 469)

The ubiquity of access and diffusion of internet resources should not perhaps be quite so overstated. While many within the New Age spiritualities make use of this resource, and while the general set of beliefs which are comprised within the set are world-affirming (in the sense of those willing to support and adopt new technologies), there are still many individuals in the UK who do not have regular access to a PC. Even those who do search the web and take part in the manifold chat rooms available, are not necessarily actively constituting their beliefs and practices via this mode of publication. Rather, the internet is at this point of the early twenty-first century, one amongst many sources for disseminating information and providing connections between the multiple nodes of the web.

The most easily available, user-friendly, format for distributing the ideas and information relevant to the web of New Age spiritualities is still to be found in the hard copy of free newspapers. From the perspective of the consumer this is a vital node, especially for those unable to link with other nodes such as the World Wide Web. The South West paper, *The*

Spark, is a gateway into a wide network of different practices and it is readily available because of its broad distribution. From the perspective of those who place the advertisements *The Spark* represents a relatively inexpensive, cost effective means of promotion which reaches a large, diverse yet focused readership interested in the area of holistic or New Age spiritualities. The mission statement of *The Spark* reflects the ideological viewpoint of the editor and accurately describes this function of the free newspaper as a node in the web of New Age spiritualities: "Our aim is to keep you in touch with creative solutions for a changing world and to help you get the best out of life. We ... call it positive change". Advocacy of a "positive" worldview is another feature of the world-affirming beliefs of many New Age spiritualities. This is equally well expressed by the nationally distributed *Positive News*, a free newspaper which acts as a source of news stories from around the world about "creative solutions" in progress, especially those related to deep ecology issues of sustainability and renewable resources.

6.1.3 *The Spark* - Distribution and Function

The hard copy provided by *The Spark* is an active element in the New Age networks of the South West of England. The paper is produced quarterly and has a print run of 25,000, with an estimated readership of 65,000 (figures for 2000). This is a conservative estimate taken by *The Spark* as "it is widely agreed that each magazine is seen by an average of four people" (Considine and Ferguson, 1994: 158). This represents a readership equivalent to many nationally distributed magazines available

from news stores throughout the country. The main distribution of the paper is through voluntary placement in local shops and public sites in a twenty mile radius of Bristol, from where *The Spark* is published. A smaller percentage of distribution is achieved by individual subscription for a small post and package fee. There is also (from issue 20, spring 2000) a new website from which information can be accessed and it is possible to register for a “free weekly-ish e-mail” to find more up-to-date details on the events and listings available in the quarterly publication. A final, crucial aspect of *The Spark* in the network of New Age spiritualities is that it is available for free. Undoubtedly the lack of cost is a prime reason for its wide distribution. Nevertheless there is a firm ideological commitment toward a wholly democratic, open access ethic in the editorial decision to remain free, despite financial constraints which mitigate towards a more exclusive distribution funded by a tariff on each paper. *The Spark* is paid for by advertising, hence the bulk of each publication is devoted to listings of events, courses and services, yet this very focus is essential to the editorial perception of the paper as a source for networking information and is the essential function of free newspapers in the web of New Age spiritualities.

An analysis of the sites adopted for distribution reveals several important features about the way free newspapers function as nodes in the web of New Age spiritualities. The sites can be divided into a number of distinct categories, although it will be clear that there are significant connections between many of them, for example between the category of health and

medical centres and that of health food shops - a holism which accurately reflects both the worldview of New Age spiritualities and the paradigm of the web. A further relational link exists between the content of editorial and features in the magazine and the ethos of the distribution sites. Merely operating as a site for distribution does not of course lead to the conclusion that these sites advocate the content of the magazine. However, while site leaders may disavow support for editorial content, they elect to take the paper and provide a service for employees, clients, patients or customers by so doing. If editorial content was considered opprobrious the sites could simply choose not to act as distribution centres. There is then an implicit acceptance of *The Spark's* content, though this may range from a bare acceptance to a more explicit commendation of the paper's perspective.

There are a number of ways to categorise the distribution centres that provide a base from which individuals may obtain *The Spark*: education; ethical businesses; health food stores; medical centres and alternative therapies; networking centres; major local businesses; religious centres. The seven areas outlined here serve to indicate the main fields of activity to which *The Spark* is connected. These areas are themselves other nodes in the wider web of New Age spiritualities, and they have their own webs of interlinking networks extending far beyond the rubric of those interested in spirituality. The first category, listed above, is education. The most significant education centres acting as sites are the state funded systems in the South West: University of the West of

England, University of Bristol School of Education, and Soundwell College. These represent large distribution centres but could not be considered as explicitly supporting *The Spark* except that, at some level, a decision has been taken that *The Spark* correlates with the interests of some elements of the education community, staff and students. There are, however, educational centres with direct links to the values of *The Spark* which are privately funded, such as the Waldorf School and the Small School. The former is based on the principles of Rudolf Steiner, whose anthroposophy, influenced by the Theosophical Society of Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant, has been a key influence on New Age spiritualities (Tingay, 2000; Heelas, 1996: 44-5). The latter is in part influenced by Steiner and also by E. F. Schumacher's concept of "small is beautiful" which, again, is an important thread influencing many New Age spiritualities (Ferguson, 1980: 356-7; Campbell and Brennan, 1994: 196; Appendix B).

A more direct area of explicit approbation for *The Spark* where the circle of support is also more mutual is that of ethical businesses. Organisations such as Bishopston Trading Company, Radford Mill Farm Shop and the Soil Association are all founded on ecological principles that are informed by spirituality. The close nature of their relationship to *The Spark* is a mutuality derived from their position as advertisers within the magazine and distributors of the magazine. Nevertheless, these businesses also extend beyond the boundaries of New Age spiritualities, as their customers and clients include many individuals who do not

engage with the New Age spiritualities. The links extending from one node in the web to other nodes are both weak and strong: there are strong links from *The Spark* to these ethical businesses, and both weak and strong links to the clients who use these businesses.

A third area for distribution of the magazine are health food shops. These distribution points are, like the former group of businesses, run on ethical principles of non-violence, in that they reject exploitation on a human and planetary scale. They also function as significant network centres for other nodes in the web of New Age spiritualities. Notice boards are a common feature of these businesses and play an important part in the informal network of communication sustaining local community and national activities. The two key sales areas of health food shops are foodstuffs, often grown organically using environmentally friendly methods, and health supplements in the form of vitamins and a variety of remedies from herbal to homeopathic. Health food stores are thus linked with the fourth area of distribution utilised by *The Spark*, healing and therapy centres.

The role of healing in the New Age spiritualities is integral to the notion of holism described by the tripartite concept of Mind, Body, Spirit. William Bloom devotes a significant proportion of readings in *The New Age: An Anthology of Essential Writings* (1991 - see also Hedges and Beckford, 2000) to medicine and healing which he defines as an element of New Science. The conception of being human in New Age healing and therapy is holistic in the sense of encompassing all aspects of an

individual's life. Healing includes relationship with the world: "according to this worldview, matter, energy and consciousness are one continuum and, like the hologram, all aspects of the whole can be contained and enfolded in a single part" (Bloom, 1991: xvi). However, this conception is not the paradigm of all the healing centres from which *The Spark* is distributed. Alternative medical practices such as the Malmesbury Acupuncture Clinic undoubtedly share holistic concepts of healing with New Age spiritualities, though from the specific trajectory of Chinese medicine enculturated in Britain. However, allopathic paradigms of healing predominate in centres such as the Bristol Dental Clinic. Between these different systems lie organisations like the Bristol Cancer Help Centre which is one of the foremost centres in the UK for employing both allopathic and alternative models in the cure and amelioration of cancers.

A fifth more amorphous category for distribution centres can be described as networking centres. These organisations have many roles in the community and may have business aims quite other than engagement with spirituality. Yet a certain aspect of their mode of operation relates to the web of New Age spiritualities as they accept *The Spark* and in several cases other related information on courses, events and advertisements about local holistic therapists. The nature of these networking centres range from the café society of MudDock and Rainbow Café in Bristol to local libraries, which are key resources for all community services and activities. Other important distribution sites

include major arts venues such as The Arnolfini and The Watershed which also have a correlate café society of fringe or alternative members for whom engaging with the arts is a core element of spiritual expression (cf 5.2.3 on the role of creative arts in New Age spiritualities). Some networking centres have obviously less direct involvement with New Age spiritualities, yet their existence as distribution sites is indicative of the wide and general interest in the kinds of service promoted by *The Spark*. This group includes Bishopston Community Centre, the Deaf Centre, Kingsdown Sports Centre, Riverside Garden Centre and the Youth Hostel Association. Thus *The Spark* has a role as a local service, and the listings therein comprise a subset of the community services delivered to people in the South West of England.

Major businesses and organisations in the south west of England comprise a further category of distribution sites. These organisations would not express explicit support for all the editorial content of *The Spark* and could not be considered focal elements in a study of New Age spiritualities. Yet for some, book shops like Waterstones, the interests of the New Age seekers form a significant part of their sales, while the activities of businesses related to New Age spiritualities are of undoubted significance to the Chamber of Commerce. Other organisations such as the BBC, HTV, Hewlett Packard and the Easton Business Centre, may only have a limited interest in the field of New Age spiritualities, but take *The Spark* in the interests of employees and to keep informed regarding the activities of the local community.

A final category for sites where individuals have easy access to *The Spark* are religious centres. *Openings* in Bath is an organisation specialising in hosting New Age courses. It was formed on the premise of disseminating information on New Age and motivating local individuals towards a more spiritual worldview through workshops and seminars. The Friends Meeting House, which acts as another distribution site, hosts many diverse religious groups and has historically been a centre for alternative perspectives on religion and society. The Maitreya Dharma Centre in Glastonbury is another site which again indicates the parallel interests of many involved in the New Age spiritualities with eastern religions and Buddhism especially (Campbell, 1999: 35-48; Chryssides, 1999: 312-314; Walter, 1993: 135).

My purpose in this analysis of the distribution centres for *The Spark* is to exemplify further the notion of New Age spiritualities as socially engaged activities. That is, in tracing the route taken by *The Spark's* distribution, the practical and functional sources of New Age spiritualities are also discovered. These sources indicate social and ecological ideologies of direct personal action, and community level engagement with events and activities that are key elements of New Age spiritualities. A further consequence of this descriptive elucidation is simply to map out the field of activities and interests that may be conceived as within the set of New Age spiritualities as practices rather than belief systems. However, the map provided is specific to *The Spark* and is thus only applicable to the South West of England. It does not include non-local sites. Neither does

The Spark include advertisements for non-local organisations, which are significant elements of world-wide New Age spiritualities. There are no advertisements for example for the Findhorn Foundation in the north of Scotland or the Esalen Institute at Big Sur in California. Furthermore, neither can *The Spark* be said to include or represent all aspects of the web of New Age spiritualities; texts, for example, do not have a place in a listings paper, unless they are under review.

But the notion of “representing” the New Age is anathema to editorial perceptions of *The Spark*. The same antipathy to being specifically associated or indeed only linked with New Age is true for the editors of *Resurgence*. *Kindred Spirit*, on the other hand, is self-avowedly committed to Mind, Body and Spirit, and editorial content promotes New Age thinking. A similar approbation for the term New Age is evident in *South West Connection*, particularly in terms of psychotherapy and healing techniques, as is clear in the initial mission statement to the publication:

The Human Potential Movement covers a broad spectrum of activity that encourages personal development and natural/holistic therapies. ‘THE CONNECTIONS’ seek to reflect and stimulate that activity. (*South West Connection*, 57: 1)

Yet each of the publications contain material which comes within the rubric of New Age spiritualities as they are defined in this thesis. The term “New Age”, as we have seen, is viewed by many with suspicion, and even hostility. Often this is because of the media associations with New Age travellers (equally a misnomer as a generic category for many

travelling people). There is also a common perception of New Age as “hippy and dippy” - lacking intellectual substance, spiritual discipline, and replete with individuals focused on hedonism, or charlatans out to make a “quick buck” from the gullible. Given the currency of this perception of New Age, it should not be surprising that editors are decidedly wary about the existence of the term in their publications. The notion of “spirituality”, on the other hand, does not (at this historical moment) carry such pejorative implications and is widely used by all publications cited.

6.1.4 *The Spark* as Node in the Web

It is possible to define seven significant strands in the relationships between *The Spark* as node and its place within the web:

1. Its dispersal and diffusion: the relationship between the information provided by *The Spark* and the organisations willing to promote, by implication at least, that information;
2. Its mission: the stated intentions and agenda of the editor;
3. The links to the individuals described by the topline results, those who read and use the paper.
4. An emphasis on practical issues;
5. A focus on ecological and sustainable issues;
6. A stress on transformation, human potential and healing;
7. A concentration on community;

The first and second strands have been discussed in the sections above, 6.1.2 and 6.1.3, while the third strand relating to individuals will

be examined in detail in the analysis of the qualitative data, in the second part of this chapter. The final four strands will form the subject of this section as they are focused on the content of the paper in terms of editorials, features and listings.

It is not the purpose of this study to critique the house-style evident in *The Spark*, but it should be noted that the contrasting styles and registers of a free paper and an academic research paper have different histories and different audiences. The descriptive analyses of my research necessarily include source reference that will inevitably influence the tone and language employed in this section. So, for example, the features content of *The Spark*, issue 21, summer 2000, is listed on the front cover in these terms: "Tell me about it - Spark guide to counselling and psychotherapy; Spark gets the hemp - The Cannabis controversy?; Urban misses - Cycling in the city; Sex, choc and toothbrushes - Readers wows; Write up your psyche - Graphology; The stile guide - The Spark guide to the great outdoors." The vernacular style and use of linguistic puns is common in journalism, but *The Spark's* adoption of such techniques is not the focus of this analysis.

Pragmatic solutions and practical guides are an essential theme in many sources for the New Age spiritualities. While many beliefs espoused by New Agers are ethereal and otherworldly, the praxis of these beliefs is frequently grounded in soil and society. Thus local events and local solutions form an important ideological structure within New Age spiritualities. The free newspaper is a source for gaining information

about practical, sustainable initiatives in the local community as well as a networking source for gaining access into specific areas of the community. The model for gaining access and more information employed by *The Spark* is the insertion of “*ffi*’s” (“for further information”), listing addresses, websites, phone numbers and e-mail addresses for related relevant sources, following each article and review. In this way the paper works as a hub or node of a highly complex, polymorphous web.

Each of the four strands - practical issues, ecological and sustainable issues, transformation, human potential and healing, and community issues - is supported by a wide range of listings within the directory. The activities and services offered are the subject of the features articles, which are personal accounts of the services offered rather than rigorous analyses of the validity or viability of them. Thus “Analyse this” on counselling, (issue 21: 8-9), offers an overview of the variety of counselling and psychotherapeutic techniques and an abbreviated plan for a would-be trainee. The main material for the article is derived from interviews with local practitioners and trainees who provide a short gloss on each area considered. Web and network structure predominates, providing a context for the article with the extensive *ffi* list focusing on local organisations, advertisements for psychotherapies and courses on counselling framing the article. The reader is enjoined to “check out our extensive counselling listings” in the directory. Indeed the directory’s longest listings relate to transformation, human potential, and healing, a

fact which is in accord with other listings (cf Kate Brady and Mike Considine's comprehensive text, *Holistic London*, 1990, over half of which is dedicated to "psychotherapy and body therapies", and William Bloom's *The New Age*, 1991, one third of which is composed of selections related to healing and human potential).

The relationship between healing, psychotherapy and transformation is a core theme in Marilyn Ferguson's notion of a New Age paradigm:

For many Aquarian Conspirators, an involvement in health care was a major stimulus to transformation. Just as the search for self becomes a search for health, so the pursuit of health can lead to greater self-awareness. All wholeness is the same. The proliferating holistic health centres and networks have drawn many into the consciousness movement. (1980: 257-8)

This thesis seems to be supported by *The Spark* directory's emphasis on complementary and natural health clinics and practitioners, which range from acupuncture and craniosacral therapy to rebirthing, Thai massage and Zero balancing. The content of the advertisements explicitly connects psychological well-being and process with physical healing. So, for example, Zero balancing proclaims, "using finger pressure and held stretches ... ZB provides a point of stillness around which the body can relax, giving the person the opportunity to let go of unease and pain, experiencing a new level of integration" (*The Spark*, 21: 24). Research into the role of healing within New Age spiritualities equally supports the general hypothesis of the significance of psychotherapeutic practices and healing techniques in the holistic perception of personal

transformation prevalent amongst New Agers (Albanese, 1992; Rose, 1996; Hedges and Beckford, 2000).

A further link between the four strands connecting *The Spark* to the web of New Age spiritualities is between psychotechnologies and ecology.

Fritjof Capra expresses the relationship in this way:

The link between ecology and psychology that is established by the concept of the ecological self has recently been explored by several authors. Deep ecologist Joanna Macy writes about "the greening of the self", philosopher Warwick Fox has coined the term "transpersonal ecology", and cultural historian Theodore Roszak the term "ecopsychology" to express the deep connection between these two fields, which until very recently were completely separate. (Capra, 1997: 12)

The holistic philosophy of many New Age spiritualities necessitates such a dynamic integration. Moreover, the extended concept of Self adopted by New Age spiritualities is more than the metaphysical vedantic conception of the identity of *atman* with *brahman*, it is also a physical panentheism. Thus we may say that philosophically the New Age idea of Self has roots both in the metaphysics of Hinduism *and* in the metaphysics of western philosophers. Cartesian mind-body dualism underlies much of the post-enlightenment scientific project, especially in the biological and medical sciences. Dualistic empiricism stands, often as a "straw man", in opposition to the holism of alternative and complementary healing. Entwined with the colonising ideology of technological applications, in which matter is conceived as a tool for human ingenuity, the mind-body dualism, from the perspective of deep

ecologists, has separated the human community from its relationships with the community of the natural world. The integrative notion of the holistic transpersonal self has both a spiritual and a material identity with its source, the world. It is in part for this reason that James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis has such considerable resonance in New Age spiritualities.

The Spark directory emphasises this link with listings on ecological and sustainable issues alongside those of personal development and health. Organic products and health foods are aimed at the same market as spiritual techniques for self-development where the concern for environmental issues is as significant as personal health. The Bay Tree offers organic foods, herbal and homeopathic remedies and allergy testing; the Better Food Company claims in their advertisement that "every time you buy organic food you are making an active contribution to your own health and the future health of our countryside"; Rubbish Revolution exhorts readers with the phrase, "go on, be a rotter" in order to promote compost bins which help the local community by saving on landfill sites and disposal costs and cutting pollution.

While many individuals do not take an active role in all parts of the web they encounter through *The Spark*, there is a substantive basis for the claim that many do take a positive interest in various strands connecting to other parts of the web. The relational network and ethos of this free paper makes links between the multifarious modes that constitute the New Age spiritualities. Many of the practices, businesses and

organisations that advertise in *The Spark* are themselves nodes of localised webs. Functioning as webs they also make connections between the focal strands of a practical response to ecological and sustainable issues, and the praxis of transformation, human potential and healing techniques in a local community context.

6.2 READERS OF *THE SPARK*

6.2.1 Individual Pathways in the Web

It is one of the central claims of this thesis that New Age spiritualities are best conceived in terms of a weblike network, that there are structural nodes which interlink multiple connecting threads, thus giving the image of the web. It is a further claim that each node is a web in its own right with manifold strands feeding out to other webs, thus giving the image of webs within webs. It is also claimed in this thesis that many descriptions of New Age spiritualities lack the dynamism inherent in the practice of spirituality by focusing too keenly on either doctrine or structural themes related to social organisation. The dynamic element of the web model is found in the shifting histories of the nodes, which include doctrinal and structural change, and in the ever-shifting threads connecting webs. The threads are created by the diverse practices and doctrines of individuals whose personal pathways form their own unique webs. One individual may weave many threads, as Eileen Barker has described a putative New Ager who “hops” between different practices:

It would not be impossible for committed seekers in California, Amsterdam or Highgate to spend twenty minutes in Transcendental Meditation each morning before embarking on their Tai Chi, then going on to attend a channeling session on Monday, to meet with their co-counsellor on Tuesday, have an Alexander lesson on Wednesday, watch an Osho video on Thursday and participate in a Forum seminar throughout the weekend. Two months later one might find them chanting "Hare Krishna", "Om Shanti" or, perhaps, "Nam Myoho Renge Kyo". (1999: 17)

The biographical information gained through the questionnaires and particularly the interviews from a selection of *The Spark* readers provides detail on the way the threads linking the webs are constructed (though none are quite such "workshop butterflies" as Barker's pastiche might suggest).

There are specific methodological difficulties in constituting a typological web of an individual's spiritual beliefs and practices. Unless the researcher is willing to predetermine the results of an interview by filling in boxes, to "cookie-mold" data, as Joseph Campbell criticised Jung in his use of empirical information, the interview process yields amorphous results for which generic categories can be too simplistic. Thus the two seven-fold models (above) describing the distribution of *The Spark* and its place as a node in a wider web are only partially useful as congruent models for the webs made by individuals. To maintain the authenticity of qualitative research and retain the value, which is also an ideology, of representing the particular and individual pathways of the research group, requires sensitivity to the specificities of biography. Nevertheless, there are themes within the personal stories that have sufficient

recurrence to draw an outline of spiritual belief and practice amongst my research sample.

The first of these themes is the dichotomy, already defined in the questionnaire analysis, of formal and informal networks. The formal network is expressed in the institutional, organisational and public aspects of New Age groupings. In some ways the entire sample is connected to a formal element of the New Age spiritualities, for it was through an organisation that I was able to make contact with the individuals. However, there are many levels or degrees of engagement with the formal aspect of the New Age spiritualities. SS1.13, for example, had few links with formal groups and organisations of New Age spiritualities, while SS1.31 had been or was currently involved with groups as diverse as the Catholic Church, Unification Church, *exegesis*, *Psychology of Vision*, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, and was, at the time of interview, an art therapy teacher. This then is a second salient feature of individual webs, the varying degrees of engagement with formal and non-formal aspects of New Age spiritualities.

A third theme of similarity amongst the researched group is the commonly held notion of degrees of spirituality. Personal biography, for most, is a "pilgrim's progress" from darkness to light, from impurity to purity. It is interesting to note that this represents a personal ideology and there is not necessarily a correlate belief that all humans are involved in this journey. The perspective of "degrees" of spirituality seems to include the view that there are people "outside the loop", for

whom spiritual experience and ideas are not important. These people are not, therefore, categorised in terms of spiritual attainment. This judgement is often applied only to those actively pursuing a spiritual path.

Yet while there exist apparent absolutes regarding the essential nature of humanity, and the world as spiritual, the relativist trope remains an important ingredient in many biographical accounts. For at the same time as there are degrees of engagement and spiritual attainment, there are degrees of knowledge. The Kuhnian interpretation of a science which overwrites itself in successive revolutions and the Nietzschean death of God have undermined the claims of any field of human knowledge to absolute truth. Thus a common theme for those involved in New Age spiritualities is that of the partial truths of the religions. It is a significant feature, derived both from the questionnaire sample and the smaller interview sample that in terms of a doctrine or of knowledge in general, many individuals assert a relativist worldview. No single religious tradition or system of knowledge is considered conclusive.

Grace Davie's analysis of Christian church membership in the UK (1994) led her to conclude that many of the population could be considered as "believing without belonging". But while many of the individuals involved with New Age networks are affiliated to and even active within a church community they are circumspect about defining themselves within a single religious tradition. Furthermore, their questioning of faith is different from doubt about the veracity of a single tradition; they accept

and reject parts of many faiths. Thus Davie's epithet requires amendment for these spiritual seekers: they belong, but they barely belong, and from a Christian perspective they also barely believe.

A further aspect of the personal webs constructed by the interview sample is related to the idea of reflexivity. All those I interviewed were highly self-aware in the sense of their self-conscious selection of different religious beliefs. This self-awareness exists within a broad historical and cultural background that has focused on the idea of the self in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The reflexive awareness of individuals in understanding their role within the world has considerable currency in academic investigations into identity, subjectivity, and the self. This awareness is evident in the modernists' questioning of tradition and understanding of the artist as both child of tradition and moulder of tradition. It is especially evident in the acute irony of postmodern art and self-referentiality of postmodern criticism (cf Harvey, 1990; Gellner, 1992). There are historical resonances in the Greek and Roman "techniques of the self" described by Foucault, though he differentiates their approaches from those of the New Agers. There are also elements of romantic perceptions of the self and the American enlightenment, evidenced for example in Walt Whitman's experience of "I" in *Leaves of Grass*. This is a crucial feature of the New Age spiritualities: a constructivist, pragmatist, individualist and historically situated, yet postmodern concern for the self, imbued with an eclectic

conception of the spiritual derived from nearly all of the world's religious traditions.

A final theme is related to New Age spiritualities as practices of the self. It is the reification of praxis prior to doctrine, of experience over ideas. Throughout the sample interviews there are references to the inadequacies of doctrinal approaches to religion, while the value of experience as a basis for spiritual knowledge is prioritised. The notion of wisdom in the sense of accrued knowledge is not current in New Age spiritualities. The term "wisdom traditions" (a ubiquitous generic category to be found in many New Age writings) refers to religions that are translated into practical programmes of ecological stewardship with a panentheist understanding of spirituality. Practices are the paradigm of New Age spiritualities rather than beliefs and ideas. Indeed, beliefs are rather derogated as one interviewee explained regarding her view of the differing perspectives of religious traditions: "I see it all as maps of the territory not the reality ... belief kind of implies a leap into not my experience ... a concept, an intellect thing" (SS1.31). The prime importance of "spirituality in everyday life" (which is another widespread and resonant phrase in New Age spiritualities) is the practical application of a spiritual understanding. Thus the same interviewee stated:

I see a lot of "spiritual" equals flaky, airy-fairy. I hope I'm not like that. I think I'm a very down to earth practical woman who brings it into my everyday life and makes it work. Unless I can do it on the 36 bus with the horrible old driver or the student who makes me sick

because he smells so much, it's just so much jargon really. (SS1.31)

6.2.2 Personal Spiritualities

Reaching the webs of interactions made by the interviewees required encountering their biographies. That is to say, discovering the links in the web required questions about how they made a connection with the wider web of New Age spiritualities that led them to the adoption of a particular belief or a specific practice. Individual anecdotal accounts are notoriously inaccurate in a factual sense - what is remembered now is a fragment of what happened then. Like Mary Daly's dazzling autobiography *Outercourse* reflection "moves in particular paths - not from "point to point," but from Moment to Moment ... [it] is far from a 'straight line' in the usual sense; it is not 'linear' but Spiralling. Its Moments are usually unpredictable" (1992: 2).

These moments are weak foundations for a great theoretical structure. The partial accounts seem belittled by the grand themes of world economy and society which many pundits and scholars conceive as prefiguring individual choices and actions. When set against globalisation, commercialisation or commodification, personal choices appear to be merely products of these great movements. Yet from the perspective of personal narrative, what was chosen was not determined by impersonal external forces, but by individual decisions and unique circumstances. If, for my sample, there is a great spiralling from which biographical moments are chosen, it is a spiral of spiritual journey from

partial truth to full engagement achieved through practices of the self. It is, simply, another model by which the world is constructed. These discrete moments emerge from an implicit ontology that, in a Heideggerian sense, being is supported by Being. The grand or meta-narrative underpinning these spiritual seekers' biographies is spiritual: the material is interpolated by spirit; the world is interconnected and interpenetrated on material and spiritual dimensions; to be human is to be spiritual and to be connected with other spiritual beings.

Thus one interviewee described her sense of the spiritual and her understanding of spiritual knowledge in terms of communication and connection:

We're all on the same planet ... the diversity is enormous, but it comes from the same place - being a spiritual person. Firstly I'm here in order to make sense of why I'm here, and secondly part of that making sense is also being open to other people, communicating, supporting each other along the way. [Spiritually conscious people] are open to questioning things. They have a relationship to the form of their lives that is less rigid and addictive than others. They are more open to change and actively seek out ways in which the spiritual side of themselves can be both contacted as a resource and expressed and used creatively, in their personal lives or in the wider world. (SS1.14)

There are many reasons why each one of the interview sample elected to welcome me into their homes and tell me stories about their lives which were of profound significance to themselves. Communication underlies most interviewees' acceptance of being interviewed, that is, communication as part of the ideology of sharing (see above, 6.1), and communication as part of the practice of engagement with spiritual life

(much as discussion groups emerge as part of Christian church communities to investigate aspects of belief). There is a further element of the need for public endorsement. My research interest in their experience gave implicit approbation to their spiritual interests. There is also an element of narcissism. The only individual who exhibited clear self-interest from a psychological definition of narcissism provided little valuable information for the purposes of my research. He was eager to proclaim past experiences of talking on *The People versus Jerry Sadowicz* on television and on radio phone-ins; he was not interested in the purpose of the interview, and did not listen to my questions, responses or interjections. There is also a key element of each individual's private purposes in undertaking the interview, a motivation that often remained undisclosed, and may indeed have been unknown to the interviewee, embedded in his or her unconscious.

By definition (they agreed to be interviewed) each of the interviewees was at a stage in their lives when talking about their personal spiritual journey to someone unknown had relevance and a meaning. Each of the sample was articulate about this journey, their past, because they had made a framework for understanding their lives. They were confident about their sense of self, an identity constructed by biographical narrative. The best example of this structured personal history emerged in the account of an interviewee who had been an atheist and an alcoholic, but through a series of events and processes became involved in New Age spiritualities. His story contains many of the key beliefs of

the New Age spiritual seekers and is worth outlining here, if only to empirically exemplify the theoretical themes examined in this chapter. However, though I may use parts of his narrative to support my theory with the notion that his life is indicative of generic themes, it is important to assert the unique and poly-faceted reality of each biography. A statistical commonplace is derived from multiple and specific emotional realities. I want to avoid Judith Stacey's poignant criticism (cited above, 4.1.2) that the ethnographic mill "has a truly grinding power" (1991: 113) on the objects of its research.

This interviewee, "Aled" (SS1.13), went to a boarding school from a young age, which perhaps explains why he was uncognisant of his parents' lives. "[I was] shocked in later life to learn that they [his parents] were both Sunday school teachers". Aled defined himself as deaf to any religious idea, "I grew up having no opinion whatsoever, it didn't impinge on my life at all ... I was very scientific in my outlook I suppose". The cultural background of limited involvement with the Christian church that is then overwritten by a scientific, secular perspective is a common experience in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries. It is indicative of the process of secularisation. It is equally a commonplace that a major personal trauma may lead an individual back to religious roots, as happened with Aled. "A specific incident led to an expansion of my consciousness of myself and my connection to the rest of humanity ... before I was completely blind to it all. Deaf" (SS1.13).

Alcoholism, a product of patriarchal excesses from childhood according to Aled, had come to blight his life. "My father was a dictator when I was a child. I was trapped, a powerless child. I never learnt to use my power [except] in rebellion and being anti-social". His alcohol dependency was a projection of this powerlessness into his adult life. But the dysfunctional relationships of his childhood were also projected onto his adult relationships. He was losing his wife and children while his business collapsed, - "driving home one night, fog, windy country lanes ... I was losing it basically ... the pain of it all got so great I shouted, 'if there is a God you'd better help me now'." Very quickly his life changed. Joining Alcoholics Anonymous did not save his marriage, but he began a ten-year process, as he has come to understand it, to a spiritual view of his life. At first he, "went to the other extreme. Bible bashing God had saved me ... it took five years for me to move back from that position". The AA twelve-step programme was successful in overcoming alcoholism, "but if you weren't independent minded enough you'd get sucked into the rigidity of it all". Part of Aled's process, from his hindsight perspective, was to move from rigid rules to personal views and beliefs. "I began to allow myself to have my own views rather than have somebody else impose their views on me ... So I began to gain a sense of me, who I was and what I thought of things".

One facet of these new ideas was to question the patriarchal God - in Aled's words "the all-powerful father". Another aspect was uniting the two worlds of science and religion, so long disparate in his

understanding. This occurred when he began to read new physics texts, including Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1976) and *The Turning Point* (1983). Other readings related to the world's religious traditions, "but in every one I saw a fundamental problem, 'we're right and you're wrong' ... that excludes people ... I was developing this personal spirituality which didn't fit in with these things. I mean it fitted with them all but not with any single one exclusively". A further experience significant in Aled's narrative was with a "small cultish nature lovers" group in Colorado. Having travelled to America with a friend, he camped for three months with this group that was led by a charismatic part American Indian leader who claimed to follow the Masters, a group of Tibetan Buddhist monks. Aled states he became disillusioned with the group because, amongst other reasons, the collective paranoia of the group about FBI spies was, to Aled, quite irrational. Aled's conclusion to his autobiographical account and about his beliefs reads like a mission statement for many individuals involved in New Age spiritualities:

It sounds like a mish-mash and it is. It's like making big pot of soup, boil it all up and in the end you've got something gorgeous and you don't know how and you don't know why, it just is, you could never repeat the recipe .. It ended up with me having a sense of how everything was connected and how everything did make sense in a very paradoxical way ... All we can use is language, we can't express ourselves directly from our brains or from our hearts. Our words are inadequate to describe spirituality. When we try to use words it becomes too rigid ... its very personal, its me ... My beliefs are liquid. I have no rigid beliefs. - That is paradox. You can change your beliefs, why not?"

Yet despite all Aled's disclaimer's, there are beliefs, if only that one should not have beliefs. Like the eye that cannot see itself or the critical theory that declaims against the existence of meta-narratives, which is itself a meta-narrative: we cannot step outside language. We may recognise the system of significations and symbols which constitute a particular language-game, but we will always be working within an alternative language-game. The entirely relativist circularity of these linguistic philosophic analyses is, ironically, a historical strand in the pervasive understanding within the New Age spiritualities that signifiers such as beliefs are inadequate to comprehend the sign itself. From the perspective of the New Age spiritualities, the spiritual reality of the world is only truly understood through experience.

The ebb and flow of experience is contained within the term "spirituality in every day life". The perception of New Age seekers is that spiritual experience interpolates all experience, at whatever level of engagement with the web network. The conscious recollection of spirituality is brought about by the practices of the self. These may be involvement at a formal event such as a workshop, informally in talking with friends, or simply being alone. The most frequently practised forms of recollecting spirituality in this sense are the self-devised rituals, meditations and contemplations of the New Age seeker. Atypically, for the research sample, Aled's practices did not include (at the time of interview) any specific rituals. He denied the utility of any ritual observances because he considered that "there is no formula that I can discover", though he

was active in New Age workshops, and he defined all within his close circle of friends as “like me” in their spiritual views.

The self-devised rituals are as eclectic as the sources of religious beliefs amongst New Age spiritualities. While the overall set of practices often includes some involvement with organised religious ceremonies of the traditional religions, these events and experiences are a supplement to personal rituals. Some individuals from the sample were deeply antagonistic to organised religion. “I walked through Bristol Cathedral when I came here twenty years ago. I energetically felt like I was walking through porridge. Which is probably my projection - it’s like hospitals, the institutional reaction to it” (SS1.31). This individual had developed a variety of spiritual practices to find spirituality in every day life. Her perception of the spiritual was an ineffable “otherness that’s within us”. She practised a regular form of sitting meditation as well as following workbooks such as Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way* (1992).

I feel it’s there ... I might see something in someone that is beautiful ... my way is to connect with that bliss through my meditation ... I want to touch that daily ... that otherness I get a feeling of in doing my artwork, creative visualisation and meditation ... I do about an hour and a half, but I’m flexible. (SS1.31)

This individual also followed the teachings of Maharaji, whose Hindu derivative approach has a small following based in South East England. Along with these strands of practice and engagement with formal groups she develops personal and individual rituals, some that also include friends. Encountering the natural world as evidence of an underlying

spiritual reality is an important element of the spiritual for all religious traditions. So she has actively sought and created rituals which included:

Nature, being by the ocean or in the woods, the trees at the end of my garden ... I do my rituals. I often celebrate the full moon by lighting candles in the garden, or the solstice in my own way. But I wouldn't want to be banging drums around the fire with a load of other people. I like to make it up. I do with friends ... I feel Celtic. I resonate with that and I resonate with the land ... It interests me to be pragmatic and I think the true mystics are very pragmatic people. They're living in the world but bringing spirit into it. So I see there could be a danger of becoming a workshop junkie. I always like to integrate and utilise what I've learnt. (SS1.31)

Another interviewee provides an equally good example of the spiritual seeker who constructs a set of methods or practices to develop the self in connection with a deep spiritual awareness of the world. This individual had been brought up as a Catholic, but for most of her adult life practised Buddhism, especially as a member of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, along with "diversions into politics and feminism". At the time of interview she was not affiliated with a specific religious tradition, though she had a continued involvement with the Karuna Institute (a Buddhist psychotherapeutic organisation) and with a local Methodist church where she led a prayer session once a week and helped in the drop-in centre for homeless people. Her perspective on personal religious practices focused primarily on her psychotherapy peer group who "always sit and meditate together [which is] fairly informal and unstructured." She also utilises a variety of daily methods to become aware of her spirituality - "I devise my own [practices] I'm very into art ... creativity. I use American Indian sacred path cards which are another

way of contacting or staying in contact with other dimensions of oneself" (SS1.14). But she also claims a deeper knowledge of the spiritual that is no longer dependent upon specific practices, "the older I get the more it seems as though it's just pervasive, the less it seems like something separate".

A final example of the self-defined practices of the New Age spiritualities continues the theme of Native American wisdom as a seed for spiritual practice. It is a poignant expression of the simple difficulties of spiritual practice while it also evinces the great open hope and personal faith shared by many within the New Age spiritualities.

I have my own sort of few things that I do. A book called *Native Wisdom for White Minds* - a page a day, I read that every day. I was trying to sit every day but I gave that up. I've got a table in my bedroom which is like a kind of altar with crystal and josticks and candles and pictures of angels and things like that. That is my centrepiece of my bedroom and my bedroom is my haven. Every night I light candles and I sit and try to connect with my guardian angel or somebody, whoever wants to come in (SS1.24)

These interviewees' descriptions of their spiritual paths indicate the significant "privatisation" of religious authority and practice amongst New Agers. There are a wide variety of expressions of these personal spiritual practices. In "Wandering Stars: Seekers and Gurus in the Modern World" (2000: 17-36) Steven Sutcliffe makes the minor, but telling mistake of focusing too much on gurus. Sutcliffe's application of Weber's charismatic religious leaders, "heroes" and religious "virtuosi" is an appropriate analysis of many spiritual leaders, authors, course

leaders and alternative media luminaries so widely prevalent in New Age spiritualities. Indeed there is room for Freudian-cum-Adlerian analyses of ego and power of certain sect and cult leaders, promoters and public advocates in NRMs and the New Age. However, the same analytical criteria are not equally valid in a study of the “seekers”. In an excess of superlatives Sutcliffe more accurately defines the “hypersyncretic splicings of ideas and techniques” (18) and “hyperecumenicalism” (19) as key foundations for seekers’ broad amalgamations of practices and beliefs. But each seeker’s syncretism and experience are unique phenomena not to be reduced to the generic concepts of charismatic virtuosi. Rather, the model of webs within webs better accounts for the individual differentiations of each seeker. Some webs are the work of virtuosi while others may be a tortured tangled mass of contradiction and conflict. In this way the web model allows the scholar to deny simplicity and affirm complexity. The descriptions that emerge with web methodology are multiple and reflect the genuine pluralism of the objects of study.

Similar variations, between virtuosity and confused expressions of spirituality, exist across the many forms, and within the many nodes, of New Age spiritualities. Both “gurus” and “seekers” exhibit varying levels of clarity and confusion in the explanations of their beliefs and practices. These elements, amongst others, can be seen in the following chapter’s examination of another specific node of New Age spiritualities, the psychotechnology *Psychology of Vision*.

CHAPTER 7

PSYCHOLOGY OF VISION

The very perfection that I'm aiming towards is to have understanding so it can all be done from the inside. That seems terribly lonely but it is the understanding that if this is happening to me it's also happening for everybody else, in quite a different way from me ... it's no more or less valuable than what anybody else has found. (SS2.7)

I haven't pledged myself to any specific tradition, I don't feel that's my path at all. I've had a dilemma [whether] I should choose Mansukh [Patel], Chuck [Spezzano] or Jesus but I feel very recently I've stepped through that. In fact, it sounds a bit arrogant, my inner teacher, listening to all these other teachers has been to awaken my inner teacher. (SS2.16)

Forgiveness changes our perception. When we see situations differently things actually are different for us. Basically, all healing has to do with changing our perception and seeing things in a new light. (Spezzano, 1998: 4)

7.1 THE PRINCIPLES OF *PSYCHOLOGY OF VISION*

7.1.1 Foundations of *Psychology of Vision*

This chapter is concerned with a single aspect of the web of New Age spiritualities, its principles and architecture within the web. *Psychology of Vision* (henceforth, PoV) is based in Kaneohe, Hawaii, where its two co-founders, Chuck and Lency Spezzano, live. However, there are a number of national organisations that carry out PoV seminars and serve as centres for PoV products. These include Canada, Japan, Taiwan, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and the UK. The main PoV centre,

outside Hawaii, is *Psychology of Vision* UK Ltd which has its offices in Pewsey, Wiltshire. PoV provides a useful example of how a web is located in a specific area and the way the web extends across local and national boundaries. Because PoV advertises nationally participants of their courses come from many areas of the country. My questionnaire sample therefore includes respondents outside the South West of England. However, in order to maintain the specific reference to the particular geographical locality, I selected interviewees who were resident in the South West.

PoV is a significant node in the current phenomenology of the New Age in the UK. It is, however, problematic to quantify the size and influence of any organisation that depends upon a basis of public support with varying levels of engagement and activity (cf Barker's analysis of NRMs incidence and significance, 1999: 15-31). Nevertheless, we may define PoV's significance in part by the diffusion of resources it publishes and the multiplicity of courses it offers, as explained below. PoV defines a particular model of psychology and spirituality. The key foundations for the dissemination of this model are workshops, seminars and books written by its founders Chuck and Lency Spezzano.

In this section it is not the purpose to extrapolate generalisations that pertain to other nodes in the web. The description and analysis here serve to illustrate the unique location and functions of one node in the web. The corollary consequence of providing foundations for a detailed study into one of the psychotechnologies also begins to remedy a lacuna

in research into New Age phenomena by offering a structural analysis of the core principles and the material dimension of a specific organisation operating within New Age spiritualities.¹

Marilyn Ferguson's term "psychotechnology" is a particularly apt construction for New Age psychology.² The New Age appropriation of Freudian psychology, a secular mental realm, reintegrates the Greek notion of *psyche* with its presupposition of mind as soul. The consequent conjunction of the model of a spiritual mind with the concept of a technique, or technology, brings an instrumental slant to the practices of New Age psychologies. These post-enlightenment resonances of an instrumental rationality in the psychotechnologies are also inflected by postmodernist perceptions of relative language games. It is a relativism that considers the practical and contextual functions of theories rather than their absolute claims to Truth. In accord with each of these instrumental and relativist themes influencing psychotechnologies in general, Chuck Spezzano, founder of PoV, emphasises fundamental

¹ This is not to say that there has been no research in this area. Paul Heelas researched extensively into the Programmes Group Ltd and the effects of exegesis training (based on similar psychological principles as PoV) in the 1980's (Heelas, 1996: 183-6). Glenn Rupert also offers a less detailed but useful overview of *est*, Lifespring and Insight among other, especially American, training seminars (1992: 127-135). For a fuller list of scholarly investigations see York (1995: 12-13; 19-20). For a comprehensive list of business-oriented psychotechnologies see Heelas (1999).

² Psychotechnologies are commonly defined as part of the human potential movement (Puttick, 2000; Heelas, 1996). The problematic of defining Human Potential as a movement are similar to those of a *New Age Movement* - what are the boundaries of this movement? who self-defines as a part of the movement? How does such a delineation account for impact and influence outside these boundaries? Human Potential, however, does not carry such pejorative implications in popular consciousness as New Age, though its currency as a meaningful concept outside Alternative or New Age groups is more circumscribed. Psychotechnological practitioners might therefore be willing to accept that they are working with human potential, but be wary about the cultic suggestions inherent in the notion of being part of a movement.

psychological principles, spirituality, his own pedigree of psychological practice, and practical techniques rather than Truth. In *If it Hurts it isn't Love* (1998a) Spezzano claims,

This book is a collection of principles that heal. They are based on what has worked for me personally as a therapist since 1971, with over 11 years of these spent as a marriage counsellor...

This work is unabashedly spiritual. Spirituality is what I have found to be an essential part of the human mind and experience by whatever name it is called. (1998a: xiii)

In *Blockbusting* (1998b) Spezzano states that “the answers in this book are not theoretical; they are practical, a part and parcel of *this* therapists toolbox. They are effective” (7). While in *Wholeheartedness* (2000) he is yet more forthright,

I have been in the frontline trenches of therapy, and I do not particularly care about the niceties of theory ... I am practical. If it doesn't work, it doesn't matter, regardless of how pretty the concept ... The methods and techniques have worked for me and they have worked for many others ... There are other ways, I am sure. (2000: 18)

The “other ways” he has defined elsewhere in these terms: “psychology is the fastest of the slow ways ... Much faster than psychology are grace and miracles, which are always available to us” (1998b: 16). Both notions of grace and miracles clearly indicate the influences of Christianity and the *Course in Miracles* that underlie PoV principles.

7.1.2 PoV's Model of Psychology and Counselling

Most of Spezzano's publications are structured as workbooks. Practical process is evidently the keystone of PoV. On one level this pragmatic aspect of the psychotechnologies has been characterised, by popular perceptions of psychology, as a form of simplistic navel-gazing. The MP Nicholas Soames (grandson of Winston Churchill) expostulated in 1996 that:

This terrible counselling thing has grown up in Britain. Whatever you do wrong it's somebody else's fault, or your mother hit you. I think that's all balls. It's ghastly political correctness. People need to pull themselves together. I'm not a great believer in blubbing in your tent. I do get melancholy now and again, but you go to bed, sleep well and wake up pawing the ground like a horse in the morning. (*Daily Mail*, 1996, quoted in Puttick, 2000: 201)

On another level the emphasis on practice without reflection is open to oft-made criticisms about superficiality and anti-intellectualism. However, both perspectives, of being politically correct and superficial, are subject to the Foucauldian discourse analysis that questions: what are the practices of reason, and therefore power, which serve either the reaction to "political correctness" or presume the necessity of intellectual depth before practice is efficacious? While I do not reject the validity of criticism and concept analysis, the comparative perspective of religious studies, espoused especially by Ninian Smart, requires valorisation of all worldviews as having internal validity. Scholarly analysis, which emerges from discourses of the intellect, must be subtle in its attempt to describe

performative worldviews that do not operate in the rarefied atmosphere of the wholly intellectual.

Nevertheless, psychotechnologies such as PoV are as much theoretical constructions as practical programmes. They are products of the historical processes that led to the post-enlightenment paradigm of reason before faith and postmodern debates about the politically correct. Moreover the psychological wing of human potential partakes of Freudian rationality especially, which justifies vigorous rational investigation. However, the history of the study of religions has always required an equal sensitivity to non-rational realms when considering the whole worldview of religious traditions. The same perspective is required in the analysis of PoV, psychotechnologies, human potential and New Age spiritualities in the broadest sense. It is a simplistic and superficial analysis that disregards spiritual or otherworldly elements on the basis of a purely rational incoherence. As Foucault would admit, the criteria for a reasonable worldview are subject to the vicissitudes of history and culture.

At the same time as deconstructing discourses to the modes and interests of power Foucault's "positionless critique" critiques all positions, including, in this case, the psychotechnologies. One might equally employ Foucauldian analysis to the criticised as much as to the critics. Specifically we can ask, what discourse does this praxis-oriented psycho-spirituality serve? And if we are to probe the operations of the psychotechnologies further, we can use the very mode of discourse

upon which they have their foundations, namely psychology. For psychoanalysis is often the most trenchant critic of both its children and its parents: Freud has been challenged by Klein, Klein by Lacan, and Lacan by Irigaray. In just this way PoV criticises and is criticised by alternative psychoanalytic models. PoV follows Maslow and Grof in going beyond personal psychoanalysis and psychotherapy to trans-personal psychology, but is, at the same time, subject to the Freudian critique of narcissism.

However, there is a pertinent question, beyond rhetorical technique, as yet unanswered in the foregoing; what discourse does PoV serve? The response can be framed in this way: PoV functions, as do all webs, in several systems. PoV can be defined as operating within three distinct yet interlinked discourses: psychology, New Age spiritualities, and postmodern epistemology. The psychological concepts clearly derive from the history of psychology, while the focus on person-centred spirituality links PoV to New Age spiritualities. But there is another cultural discourse that dictates the *zeitgeist* of current social theory, and provides an armature for many postmodern worldviews, from secular humanist perspectives to New Age spiritualities. This discourse is epistemological and can be simply described as the paradigm of the social construction of reality. In the history of modern sociological theory on religion it emerges in Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967). According to Berger, religions provide canopies of meaning which, like any other worldview,

construct social reality. Although, as Robert Wuthnow has pointed out, “Berger’s characterisation may have more to do with our own experience in contemporary western society than it does with the way things have to be or the way things have always been” (1992: 15), this simple conception has become a trope of postmodern thinking.

It is of course true that the world of *Maya* or illusion that is constructed by humans and needs to be deconstructed to discover the true unitive reality has a long history in East Asian philosophies. And it is equally true that the insight of a world constructed by the human mind fed into the epistemological perspective of the early period of human potential psychologies, particularly through the work of Aldous Huxley. Before Berger and Luckmann’s sociological model of the human construction of reality the conceptual diaspora of eastern religious worldviews was influencing the nineteenth century American transcendentalists and the philosophy of New Thought. Emerson and Thoreau precede Huxley, who precedes the psychotechnologies, and all are predated by Vedanta from which the streams of the intellectual history of the human construction of reality return to a metaphorical Mount Kailash. The concept of the human role in constructing reality is like a giant sequoia with ancient inner rings which yet flourishes in the contemporary world. That is to say, the epistemological notion of the representational nature of human understanding of the world is as old as the earliest philosophical debates about how we can really *know* the world. The relativist epistemologies of modernity are merely a new formation of this old perception.

Huxley's influential *The Perennial Philosophy* (1946) was widely read at the Esalen Institute which itself was a foundation point for the psychotechnologies so prevalent in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Indeed it was his 1961 lecture series entitled "Human Potentialities" which provided the germ of George Leonard's study into Human Potential and informed Leonard's collaboration with Esalen co-founder Michael Murphy.³ Huxley, perhaps in more measured terms than Spezzano, emphasises the practical necessities of the perennial philosophy: his is not a work for theorists, "it contains but few extracts for the writings of professional men [*sic*] of letters and, though illustrating a philosophy, hardly anything from the professional philosophers" (1946: 10). The reason for this, he avers, is simple: the perennial philosophy is concerned "with the one divine Reality" which is only apprehended by those who fulfil certain "drastic treatments". And "in regard to few professional philosophers and men of letters is there any evidence that they did very much in the way of fulfilling the necessary conditions of direct spiritual knowledge" (11). Huxley defines these necessary conditions as learnt human characteristics, to be "loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit" but his mystics, saints or prophets only gain their knowledge from experience; it is praxis prior to doctrine or theory. This is

³ Marilyn Ferguson describes Aldous Huxley's important role in the foundation of a Californian based 1940's version of the New Age. "The British author, living in Los Angeles, was the hub of a kind of pre-Aquarian conspiracy, an international network of intellectuals, artists and scientists interested in the notion of transcendence and transformation. They disseminated new ideas, supported each other's efforts, and wondered whether anything would come of it" (1987: 52). Ferguson also states that "in the 1950's and 1960's, Aldous Huxley ... was among those who encouraged Michael Murphy and Richard Price in their 1961 decision to open Esalen, the residential center in California's Big Sur area that helped midwife much of what came to be known as the human potential movement" (137).

the discourse in which PoV primarily has its life - the mystic knowledge of the Self gained through experience.

Foucault would not be pleased with this analysis, as he would assert that practices, especially bodily practices such as those he investigated in his later works (see *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 1978), are just as much subject to the discourses of power as theoretical discourses. Moreover, the analysis I have presented is a history of genesis and continuity, while his analyses seek to fragment and decentre. Nevertheless, Spezzano's PoV partakes of a number of worldviews, secular and religious, which are widespread in contemporary society that assume the world is in some way a refraction of the human mind. Yet the PoV perspective is not merely of a socially constructed reality, dependent upon the specificities of history and culture, for it equally asserts an a-historical spiritual reality that underlies human constructions. This spiritual reality is the realm of the Divine, from which the power of Grace emerges.

Taking *Course in Miracles*, which especially emphasises the constructive role of mind, as his inspiration has led Spezzano deeply into the self-constructed reality trope to the extent that mere intentionality is the source of healing and happiness. Thus, when explaining how to use *If it Hurts it isn't Love*, Spezzano writes:

This book has been intentionally set up to fit a synchronistic pattern. This means that if you opened the book to a certain page at random, or intuitively selected a certain number between one and 366 [the number of lessons in the book] you would find the

lesson that is most important for you now. It is uncanny how the key lesson, what we need to know and understand the most, is always selected. (1998: xv)

It is quite clear that Spezzano means more than that the human mind places meaning on the objects it discovers before it. His position is not that choosing a reading at random may still help the individual, as he/she will *make* the reading pertinent. The PoV understanding of synchronicity is that the randomly chosen reading will *actually* be the right reading. This understanding is beyond the interpretive conception of human agency current in postmodern discourses, it is a magical worldview. As such it has some kinship with the divinatory practices of the *I Ching* and contemporary manifestations of paganism and witchcraft. Yet the language is resolutely that of psychotherapy, of healing and process.

Another pertinent illustration of the PoV understanding of the relationship between mind and world occurred in the first PoV workshop I attended called "Relationship, Leadership and Purpose", held at a hotel in Devizes, Wiltshire, in October 1997. Two occasions will serve as examples of the way external events were described as direct consequences of subconscious intentions of individuals: One of the participants arrived late for the first session and apologised for the delay, stating traffic congestion to be the cause. The course leader responded that any delay was brought about by this individual's own unwillingness to face the problem she had come to the workshop to remove. In the same vein, when a helicopter passed overhead drowning

out speech during an intense section of the workshop, which brought relieved mirth, the workshop leader again asserted this event had occurred in response to our collective wish to find some relief. Such simple cause and effect descriptions may appear risible to some outsiders. These events appear to indicate a literal interpretation, on both subconscious and conscious levels, of “ask and you shall receive”, that prayer has substantive effects or that by dancing the rains will come. Spezzano defines the principle as “the inner and outer worlds are inextricably connected. The outer world is a reflection of the inner” (1998b: 17). Similar perspectives are common in the worldviews of traditional nature religions, but appear quite strange to the worldview of secular scientific rationality.

7.1.3 Analysis of PoV Principles

One of the central principles of PoV events is that during workshops all occurrences and expressions are directly relevant to the psychological processes of all members of the workshop. The role of group mind has very practical consequences in the process of the workshop, for it engages all individuals in a common enterprise. It is a most pragmatic tenet for effectively bringing compassionate understanding between group members as the principle of interdependence is seen to work in practice. At the same time each individual's concentration remains at a high pitch, for if every aspect of the workshop is conceived as directly pertinent to personal issues, then every participant necessarily takes part in the proceedings, whether passively or actively. Yet the explicit

direction by course leaders regarding all their statements about group mind, synchronicity and even the model of human development and psychological process on which they base their teaching, is practical. The ideas are to be seen as techniques or a technology that achieves certain ends. Belief in the ideas is not necessary, merely the practical application is sufficient. Of course, this in itself is an ideological tenet.

The presumption that perception and intent are the sole constituents of causality has evident beneficial and problematic consequences. While workshop participants may choose to change their lives, it is often because they have the time and financial security to take, and benefit from, alternative options. My personal experience at the events of which I was a participant, through informal conversation with other participants and formal research with the sample, indicate positive benefits of the PoV programme, at least in terms of individual responses. Thus one of the sample described her understanding of positive change through consciously adapting her perception (a technique learnt from PoV workshops and a series of counselling sessions with PoV leader Jeff Allen), in these terms,

I've found my answer and it's there and it's complete and it umbrellas everything. I've looked for it for a while and it's there ... there's everything stocked in the shop ... It's to do with a principle that was proven in my existence ... I went to see [Jeff Allen] because I was so stuck. There were such high mountains, and it's ridiculous that there's this little alleyway through ... He gave me a theory to apply to my lifestyle that sounded like indoctrination ... but the fact that he said "don't believe me just experience it", as the months and years go by it becomes clearer to me that what he said was true. (SS2.7)

Yet the same options, to choose and change personal circumstances, are not so easily available to many of the world's population. The theory of outer world reflecting inner intentions does not seem to account for the merciless suffering and evil of oppression and poverty. From a political standpoint PoV seems to promote a kind of fatalistic quietism. The related themes of narcissism and lack of social and political engagement are recurrent criticisms of New Age ideologies (Bruce, 1995, 2000; Bro, 1993; MacRobert, 1988; "many who would call themselves New Agers are akin to churchgoers who are in it for the bingo and not for the worship", Clark, 1992: 97). However, as my research has shown, there is in fact a high level of social commitment amongst New Age spiritualities (cf chapter 5). Over 45% of my whole sample listed membership of "a pressure group or alternative political organisation" (question 23). This compares favourably with national figures. Considine and Ferguson cite a MORI poll measuring membership with environmental organisations and charities that shows my New Age sample to have a higher level of active engagement than the general populace. "MORI's research into green activism and consumerism reveals that ... 10% of us have joined an environmental group or charity" (1994: 157). However, it is significant to compare the PoV sample, 24% of which were members of political and environmental pressure groups, with 67% of *The Spark* sample. This last statistic seems to support a hypothesis that those actively engaged with the psychotechnologies are less concerned about social and political affairs, in the sense of direct action, than other webs of New Age spiritualities,

although PoV participants are still two and a half times more likely to be members of a pressure group than the wider population of the UK.

A further criticism of PoV principles relates to what Stephen Clark has called “plasticity of belief”. Clark’s analysis of the history of the Findhorn Foundation leads him to assert that despite a myth of continuity the actual beliefs of the community “underwent change and reinterpretation”. Clark concludes his research on Findhorn with a general, and unsubstantiated, statement about “the plastic quality of New Age beliefs and the remarkable agility with which individuals are able to modify their beliefs and assign new meaning to their experience” (1992: 104). It is a criticism akin to Karl Popper’s devastating, at least in terms of scientific theory, critique of ideologies which self-refine over time. Popper’s methodology of falsification overturned any verificationist approaches in scientific method, but he also applied falsification to Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis. Neither of these ideologies, according to Popper, stood the rigorous tests of science and both were subject to adaptation, the plasticity of Clark, over time and as new theories emerged.⁴ While PoV may not, at present, evidence a historical plasticity of beliefs, there is a considerable plasticity in the fatalist perspective that informs the basic principles of PoV. Simply put, we can extrapolate the next logical step from the PoV belief that changing perception changes the world, to the statement that failure to change the world is a failure to

⁴ Paul Feyerabend, in *Farewell to Reason*, (1987) makes an equally devastating analysis of Poppers philosophical stance as a form of “trivializing knowledge” and what he calls “Popperian pidgin science” (162-191).

change perception or “blockbust” the problem. The circularity of such a position is clear: if we change, then it is because our intention, or purpose, is sufficiently strong; if we remain stuck and fail to change, it is because we remain blocked. It is an approach that seems to oblivate external agents. There is not much in this theory to help the starving in Eritrea as a result of drought or the wrongfully imprisoned black prisoner in the southern United States as a result of continued endemic racism. This solipsist tendency becomes all too evident in these principles of problem-solving:

1. Any problem represents a conflict within our mind.
2. Change our mind; change the world.
3. Problems are the result of choices. We can make new choices.
4. Every problem has a purpose.
5. When the desire to heal or the willingness to move forward becomes stronger than the problem, the problem falls away.
6. A problem represents a fear of the next step in our lives. Confidence for the next step represents the end of the problem. (Spezzano, 1998b: 21)

From a philosophical perspective these six principles appear to be the foundations of a wholly solipsist worldview. From a political and social perspective they appear to represent a policy of laissez-faire. Yet there are other principles of equal importance within PoV that promote opposing positions of a communitarian and pro-active worldview.

The keystone of PoV is a psychology of relationships. The sub-heading for Spezzano’s most successful book, *If it Hurts it isn’t Love*, is “secrets

of successful relationships". For the corollary PoV principle to self-healing is that of healing others in relationship. The sense of agency does include a world of others, even if they are sub-agents to individual process. Thus the synchronicity of inner and outer worlds is that as the individual heals personal relationship problems, so these problems are healed for the other in the relationship.

Another cognate of personal healing is defined in the necessary, according to PoV, practical response to the principle of self-healing. Self-healing in practice is not simply an introverted process, but involves a praxis of giving to the other in the relationship. Spezzano defines this correspondence in the epithet, "when I wish to have a need fulfilled, I give the thing I feel I need" (1998a: 18). In this way the apparent narcissism of practices of the self can be seen instead as practices of interconnection. At the same time, what we may call the "principle of correspondence" asserts a compassionate worldview. PoV adapts the Freudian concept of projection, in the notion that "what we see in another is what we have projected, what we think we are" (1998a: 133). Our judgements of the other are, therefore, typically judgements about ourselves; and the same holds true for others' judgements about us. Recognising this correspondence, according to Spezzano, results in a growth of compassion as well as self-understanding.

A corollary perspective, to the principle of correspondence, is the equality of all human beings in the universal human condition that each individual is the product of specific choices and experiences. Once

personal responsibility for these choices is taken, it follows, from a PoV perspective, that “as we realise that ... we are doing the best we can, we have understanding for ourselves and other people in the human condition” (1998a: 373). A final correlate, according to PoV, which represents the practical outcome of the PoV programme and the capping stone of the PoV model as psycho-spiritual process, is the development of love. Spezzano defines this as an expression of spirituality that is both an internal learnt attribute of character and external practice of generosity:

Love is giving everything while holding on to nothing ...
In that love is the greatness of being. In that love is all
vision and purpose in life. The love that we give opens
us to a new level of feeling, and a new level of joy.
(1998a: 408)

In this way PoV contains a model which is “more than psychological repair” (*Visions*, 1999: 4), as it asserts spiritual principles and a method for attaining spiritual goals. Undoubtedly my analysis of PoV principles, into areas Spezzano calls “niceties of theory”, indicates lack of subtlety and shows PoV may tend toward a solipsist worldview. Yet for those who attend the workshops and buy the products, for the individuals in my research sample (both questionnaire and interview), there are equally undoubted perceived benefits to be derived from the programme. These benefits, according to PoV, can be easily achieved. The simple process of discovering subconscious decisions, usually made in childhood, which block an individual's freedom of expression and creativity, can be remedied by a conscious choice to amend the historical perception.

Spezzano uses an example from one of his workshops to illustrate how a perception leads to a decision that may affect an individual a whole lifetime. But, according to PoV, that decision can be re-made.

I was working with a woman by the name of Mary, who was a seventy-five year old widow ... of how she felt that her mother didn't want her. It was the heartbreak of her life.

I asked Mary, "If you were to know why you thought that it happened at the age of ...?"

"Ten," she replied.

I said, "If you were to know what was going on that you began to believe you weren't wanted ...?"

She said, "My mother scolded me very strongly."

I asked her if she'd ever scolded anyone in her life, and she laughed and said, "Yes. Quite a few!"

"Did that mean you didn't love them or like them?" I asked.

"Oh no," she replied, "it was always those closest to me that I scolded or complained to!"

"What was going on with you when you scolded them?"

She said, "The times I scolded the worst was when I was afraid for them."

So I asked, "When your mother scolded you so strongly was it that she didn't like you? Or was she afraid for you?"

At my question, Mary began to weep with sorrow saying, "She likes me. She likes me. She was just afraid for me. Oh, all these years I thought she didn't want me."

I asked, "Can you let in all of her love now?"

"Yes! Oh, Yes!" she cried.

And so change, blessed change, had come to Mary, after 65 years of carrying the pain of misunderstanding. (1998b: 15-16)

The questions as to whether it was PoV who helped Mary, or whether another psychology would have been as effective, or indeed whether she already had begun to realise her misunderstanding, are perhaps useful, though impossible to answer. At the second workshop I attended, called "Living your Purpose" (Bristol, February 1999), PoV leader Jeff Allen stated that "nothing happens in a workshop that won't happen outside anyway, in this lifetime or another, it just happens faster in a workshop." But one cannot deny the value of Mary's new understanding and decision about her relationship with her mother. Spezzano claims "it is not the experience that blocks us so much as the decision" (tape cassette two: *The Journey* - no date given) These decisions have profound practical implications for individuals and consequently, according to the PoV model, for others in relationship with them.

A number of concluding statements about the role of PoV in contemporary society and New Age spiritualities especially can be deduced from this preliminary analysis. The practical processes of psychotherapeutic practice have currency and validity in the broad stream of contemporary society. These practices have a particular significance in the penumbra of New Age spiritualities and the human potential movement. Indeed the psychology of human potential is a core web in the many webs comprising New Age spiritualities. The discourse that constitutes the New Age spiritualities is diffuse, but there are a number of hubs or nodes around which certain types of practices and concepts are focused. One web of these nodes is that of the

psychotechnologies, the area William Bloom refers to as “spiritual dynamics” (1991). The influence of a spiritual psychology of the mind is pervasive in a much broader cultural frame than the New Age spiritualities, but it has some roots in the history of human potential and New Age thinking. An important core to the psychotechnologies is that of a practice-based approach to healing. Many practitioners in this area are highly qualified in academic studies (Spezzano has a PhD in psychology), yet their principles are resolutely pragmatic prior to being dogmatic. A careful study of these practices necessarily requires going beyond an analysis of principles. It involves investigating just as much the ways in which individual psychotechnologies function and constitute themselves within the web and the effects on individual practitioners. The following section deals with these two aspects of PoV, its material dimension and the voices of workshop participants.

7.2 PoV PRODUCTS AND PLACEMENT IN THE WEB

7.2.1 PoV Training Courses

The main office for PoV UK is in Pewsey, Wiltshire. This office coordinates the events led by PoV trainers, bookings and publicity, as well as holding stores and distributing the many products produced by PoV. The section of the organisation that produces in-house materials, develops links with the media and publication by external agencies is Vision Products, which is also based at Pewsey. It is from this office that

the websites for Vision Products and PoV are maintained. (www.visionproducts-ltd.com and www.psychology-of-vision-uk.co.uk). A magazine entitled *Visions*, listing events, advertising products and containing articles on PoV themes is produced in British Columbia, Canada. A further element of the PoV network is the establishment of funds to support specific programmes. The three funds, African, Canadian First Nation and HIV, are administered by PoV in order to subsidise participants at PoV events from the three respective cultural and health backgrounds.

What follows is a more detailed descriptive analysis that considers the three major strands which emanate from PoV, linking it to the wider web of New Age spiritualities. These three strands are the courses, products and services and informal connections that form the inner structure of PoV as a node in the web. From each strand manifold filigree threads emerge, created by the pathways of individuals linking PoV to other nodes of New Age spiritualities.

The courses offered by PoV are the central method for promoting the theory underlying PoV processes. It is at the workshops and seminars that participants learn the key elements of PoV principles about human psychology, the processes of decision-making and healing. The focus of these courses is not, however, theoretical presentation, but practical process. For each course is publicised as a means of healing specific problems.

Every lecture, foundation day and workshop gives you an opportunity to look at problems that have recurred in your life. To examine why you feel blocked in certain areas.

You will learn a great deal about yourself, you will receive guidance and support. You may laugh, or you may cry, but above all you will develop towards your true potential. (Schedule of Events: Summer/Autumn 1998)

The titles of the workshops represent the themes that form the bases of PoV principles (outlined in the previous section). These course titles are indicative of the more general publicity style for contiguous psychotechnologies such as Lifespring and the Forum (formerly *est*) where the language is simple and direct, and what is offered is often presented as a complete solution to psychological problems. Typical course titles, taken from the 1999 calendar of events, include: "Living Your Purpose - from Confusion to Clarity", offered in Bristol and led by Jeff Allen; "The Psychology of Love, Sex and Marriage", offered in London and led by Chuck Spezzano; "Happiness is the Best Revenge", offered in Bristol and led by Anne-Marie Woodall and again at the Mind, Body, Spirit Festival in London, led by Chuck Spezzano; "Relationships - Your Magic Mirror", offered in Cardiff and led by Jeff Allen. Of the twenty-one courses offered in the UK between February and November 1999, nine were led by Jeff Allen, six by Chuck Spezzano and four by Anne-Marie Woodall (two did not have listed leaders). While the majority were held in different venues in London (nine), others were held in Bristol, Cardiff, Cornwall, Oxford and Glasgow.

PoV courses of this nature usually last one or two days. The question about the possibility of attaining the radical changes implied or explicitly stated in such a short space of time is paramount. The great difficulty both for the PoV leaders who support the possibility of such changes and critics who deny the validity of these claims, is that both positions are difficult to prove. The PoV leaders' basis for their claim is simply to experience a workshop, though they equally assert their own experience as evidence while also citing participant responses in publicity material. Thus, a flyer for a 2000 course led by Chuck Spezzano and Robert Holden, titled "The Heart of Success", includes the statement, "after the training, my life has begun to flow, the money situation has improved dramatically and the business is continuing to grow. My life is just getting better and better. Thanks" (1999 participant). Yet claims such as these are unproven in the sense of providing a necessary and evidential connection between PoV courses and subsequent success in business or future personal happiness. Equally, that PoV can lead to such results is impossible to disprove. Sceptics may claim the onus is upon PoV to provide necessary evidence. Yet the argument is moot because it depends upon criteria of what constitutes sufficient evidence. PoV leaders consider their own experience and anecdotal expressions enough evidence. They would also claim that the increasing numbers on their courses is due, to a large degree, to the informal network of word-of-mouth connections, which itself is sufficient substantiation of the efficacy of their practices.

There are further courses for the initiated and for individuals interested in becoming trainers of PoV. The first level of these training sessions is the ten-day trainings carried out in each of the main countries where PoV is established. The ten-day event in the UK is held in late September/early October at Salisbury. The training for October 2000, led by Chuck and his wife Lency Spezzano, was titled, "The Heart of Sexuality and Relationships" and was a residential course costing £1,600 (over one hundred participants signed up for this course). Similar courses are offered in Hawaii, three times in 2000 with tuition fees alone of \$3,000 (US) dollars while a twenty-day workshop in November 1999 cost \$5,500 (US). For the truly committed PoV adherent there are three further stages of training.

The first stage is the "100 Day International Training Programme" which involves, minimally, 30 days apprenticeship programme in Hawaii, sixty days at events or workshops led by either Chuck or Lency Spezzano, and ten days at other PoV seminars led by PoV trainers. Graduates of this programme receive a *Certificate of Completion*. The second level of training, which enables participants to adopt the title *Psychology of Vision* Trainer, is the Advanced Training Program. This programme is less clearly organised than the "100 Day Training". Participants are by invitation "because they are recognised as having the potential to be trainers of *Psychology of Vision*" (*Visions*, 1999: 41). Advanced trainers have informed me in conversation that the training involves 60 days of specific events with Chuck and Lency Spezzano, but that graduation is

dependent not upon amassing credits but the perception by the Spezzanos that the trainer has an advanced understanding of PoV principles. There are currently eleven people on the Advanced Training Program from Canada, Japan, Switzerland and UK (*Visions*, 2000: 2). The third stage of PoV training is the recently (1999/2000) initiated Masters training programme, details of which are unavailable. Currently three PoV trainers are involved in the Masters programme: Jeff Allen (Britain), Jane Corcoran (Canada) and Hiromi Kurihara (Japan).

7.2.2 PoV Products

The second major strand emanating from the PoV hub is the distribution of products. In the UK this is managed by Vision Products. The marketing of New Age spiritualities is intricately linked with the commodification of services in the post-industrial world. While important sections within the realm of New Age spiritualities explicitly reject capitalistic aggrandisement (*Resurgence* represents many for whom this is the case), others embrace material acquisition as part of a world-affirming spirituality. Of course there is a spectrum of responses to the necessities of capitalist culture within New Age spiritualities, from outright rejection to committed support.

The size of the potential market is of obvious importance for businesses operating in this field. It is difficult to quantify the extent of the market though some attempts have been made. For example, the *Holistic Marketing Directory* (Considine and Ferguson, 1994) emerged out of the

work of two contiguous organisations involved in marketing, publishing and services to New Age businesses, Brainwave and The Breakthrough Centre (founded 1988). In the *Directory* the authors seek to outline the size of the "New Consciousness" (a term they describe as "a slight improvement on New Age" - 155) market and provide directions for businesses that seek to work in this market. A key objective for Considine and Ferguson is a description of the "highly discriminating market" constituted by New Consciousness: "By definition, anything extreme dogmatic, abusive or cultish, that makes exaggerated claims, appeals to greed or flaunts conspicuous prosperity is no part of the New Age" (155). Their positive description takes this form:

This discriminating New Consciousness Market is defined, in the best marketing tradition, by the needs of its customers. And what they need is information on what is happening, on new developments in thinking; they need support and services at many different levels; they need products to facilitate their lifestyle - recycled stationery, natural clothes, permaculture equipment, chakra candles, health products and objects of beauty; and above all else they need ways of coming together" (155)

They estimate the size of the possible UK market at an improbable 45 billion pounds. This is based upon an estimate of ten percent of the adult population "spending as little as £10,000 per annum" (157).⁵ The boundaries of such estimations seem to be dependent on the positive perspective of the estimator. Nevertheless, the existence of

⁵ Considine and Ferguson mitigate their estimations with the valid rider that, "statistics are as yet hard to come by, and will remain so because so much of this trade goes through small suppliers who fall outside the net of HMSO information gathering; also because small sub-groups are not measured" (1994: 157).

organisations in capitalist culture necessitates tapping a market. There is a significant market for New Age products, and New Age organisations such as PoV depend upon these financial necessities to exist. Considine and Ferguson's *Directory* is especially appropriate to PoV's marketing as a well used copy (the only marketing and business text present) is to be found on the shelf beside the Vision Products general manager's desk at Pewsey.

PoV has a small section of the UK national market of those involved with New Age spiritualities. They have a database of 3,000 to which they send fliers for events and product information. As many of these mailshots will be to other centres interested New Age activities and households which may pass on information to friends through the wider web of connections, it is perhaps a moderate assumption to multiply the distribution of information by four to arrive at a distribution readership figure of 12,000. The year's gross turnover, between March 1998 and March 1999, for PoV UK was £237,688. However, this figure obviously does not represent the gross world turnover of PoV courses and products. It is likely that PoV Hawaii takes considerably greater receipts, though as a percentage of the enormous US market PoV remains a relatively small organisation.

In the UK PoV only began to establish itself after Jeff Allen began leading workshops in 1997. Since that time it has grown and PoV UK expect that gross turnover for 2000/2001 will be of a higher order than previous years. This seems inevitable given the 100 participants at the

UK 10 Day training in October 2000 at a cost of £1,600 each (even taking account of the many reduced rates for family members and those less able to afford the full rate). There were 27 workshops running in the year 2000, each for between one and ten days. The usual number of participants, according to PoV trainers and the Vision product manager, is between 20 and 40. This leads to the figure of between 800 and 1,000 course participants in 2000. Some individuals will visit only one event, others may come to two or more during the course of a year.

Apart from courses, PoV trainers offer personal counselling services which are conducted face-to-face, but might also be through e-mail or on the telephone. There are diverse spin-offs from the courses and services that include special programmes devised for groups or businesses that arrange individual courses. In 2000 Jeff Allen was contracted by the sailing boat *Logica* to provide PoV psychological techniques to support the crew in their training before leaving Southampton dock for a round-the-world yacht race. He was subsequently contracted to run a course for the same crew at their first point of arrival in Boston, USA.

PoV products are advertised on the web, in fliers and through a mail-order catalogue. The primary products, most widely available and read, are texts by Chuck Spezzano - though Vision Products also lists texts by Lency Spezzano, and Robert Holden, it also distributes *Course in Miracles*. Two further modes of dissemination and product placement are tape and video cassettes. These are recorded either live from PoV courses and lectures or specific presentations on PoV principles made

for the purposes of these media. A video cassette indicative of the ways in which webs are interlinked between New Age organisations is *Rainbow's End*, which includes a trainers' training in Hawaii and Chuck Spezzano's visit to the Findhorn Foundation, thereby endorsing the contiguous webs of New Age spiritualities. Occasionally fliers distributed to the mail database include workshops led by other New Age therapists who may be supported by PoV leaders. Thus a workshop for September 2000 led by Robyn Elizabeth Welch, who defines herself a "diagnostic medical intuitive practitioner", was endorsed in a PoV flier advertising PoV products and courses in this way:

We are writing to introduce an extraordinary and powerful healer who we are supporting in the UK. We apologise for using your name in these exceptional circumstances for someone outside of the *Psychology of Vision* but we believe this teacher offers much to us all. (PoV events flier, September 2000)

Support for alternative healing practitioners suggests PoV UK and Vision Products are extending their business plan to act as a portal for other New Age events.

7.2.3 Informal Webs of PoV

The third strand linking PoV to the wider web of New Age spiritualities is shaped by the informal connections made by individuals involved in the organisation of PoV UK and participants of PoV courses. The development of a newsletter in September 2000 from an informal network of PoV workshop participants illustrates one manifestation of the increasing cohesiveness of some aspects of informal network groups.

The first newsletter of *friends helping friends* operates both as an information bulletin board and a network hub from which PoV workshop participants can extend network links.

There has always been an unofficial support network for *Psychology of Vision* UK but the aim of 'friends helping friends' is to expand and develop this network. Each contact is committed to providing a nucleus to focus the energy of the work.

There is no formal structure and indeed what's on offer may vary greatly - some may invite you to a barbecue or dinner, others for a cup of tea and a chat, or perhaps to join a study group. Whatever's on offer, the underlying intention is the same - to provide support and encouragement on your healing journey (*friends helping friends*, 2000: 3).

The emergence of diverse structures within a specific network indicates the evolutionary expansion of network hubs. This example of PoV gives a concrete basis for Manuel Castells' description of the modalities of the "network society":

Networks are open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network, namely as long as they share the same communication codes (for example, values or performance goals). A network-based social structure is a highly dynamic, open system, susceptible to innovating without threatening its balance. (1996: 470)

Thus the web of PoV expands and has a morphology akin to the computer-graphic of the mathematical Mandelbrot set. The colourful expressions and novel formulations of its unpredictable expansion are the products of the unquantifiable interests, experiences and skills of the multiple individuals who come into contact with PoV through other webs. Given the existence of other networks, such as the world wide web or

closer web forms such as other psychotechnologies, it is possible to assert probabilities about the nature of the evolutionary growth of the informal PoV web. However, the success, in terms of material expansion, of PoV as an increasingly significant node in New Age spiritualities cannot be affirmed until history affords us the hindsight necessary to measure its evolutionary development. And it remains impossible to quantify the finite resonances of any web because of the complex infinitude of informal network connections and influences.

7.3 INDIVIDUAL WEBS OF PoV PRACTITIONERS

7.3.1 "Spreading the Word"

Qualitative research is the most effective mode for gaining access to the informal networks. It is only through careful and sympathetic research techniques that the "outsider" researcher is able to discover "insider" perceptions. The organic nature of webs, that is the way they are constructed by the pathways of individuals, necessitates discovering insiders' perspectives. We may describe these pathways in a number of ways, but the essential narrative must be given by the voices of those making the journey. If we fail to represent the views of the researched community, we may fall foul of Geertz's criticism of constructing "ingenuities" which bear little resemblance to the actual structure of the researched community (1973: 11). But all research has finite boundaries. The perimeter of my research into the participants of PoV workshops is

prescribed by limitations of time, finance, sample size, and geographic specificity. The voices of this sample are representative of a relatively small group - that is participants of PoV workshops in the South West of England between 1997 and 2000. Bearing these parameters in mind, we may proceed with some descriptions that are merely glimpses of the informal pathways of the individuals who include PoV as one node in their own webs of self-discovery.

Those who agreed to interviews following completion of the questionnaire were often erudite and confident that their reflections on their own experiences had some value. They had uncovered or created a shape for their personal histories that resonated with their present understanding of what they had come to be. As one of the interviewees stated,

[it's] quite simple really, just increasing understanding and understanding what my place is, my purpose is ... it's like Kierkegaard said, life has to be lived forwards and understood backwards ... understanding with some perspective. (SS2.5)

The entire interview sample cited word-of-mouth communication as the key or a highly significant means for sharing information and ideas about spiritual ideas and events (question 35, questionnaire). The prior questions in the questionnaire (questions 30-34) were also related to the notion of communication and networks. Again interviewees' responses indicated a high level of commitment to sharing information and experiences gained through workshops with other people. On one level this was because "I can only fully understand things when I translate

them in communication with others" (SS2.7). On another level the importance of sharing ideas was defined in this way, "It's an expression of the interconnectedness of all things" (SS2.16). A core modality of the definition, and expansion, of the web is via informal, word-of-mouth communications. Underlying this medium is the self-conscious adoption of communication as an active means of developing personal spiritualities.

7.3.2 Differing Complexities of the Webs

Not all of the sample were so pro-active in the dissemination of ideas amongst the networks of friends and family. One interviewee suggested that because "it's a new thing for me", communication about his involvement with PoV and on more general spiritual matters was something he avoided. In response to the question "what you talk about with friends and family is not spiritual?" he stated: "No. It's quite a difficult thing. It's finding the language that is universal. I think it's something that everybody has to find for themselves" (SS2.6). For individuals such as SS2.6, the web he wove in the realms of religions and spiritual organisations was circumscribed to a limited number of people and events. Very few of his close relationships were involved with this aspect of his interests. His biographical details marked a secular path away from his Church of England upbringing. From the time "I got thrown out of Cheltenham College for filling the hymn books and Bibles with ink" this interviewee had developed networks of an explicitly secular nature. His entry into New Age spiritualities was through PoV

and, at the time of interview, this was the only major connection he had with the manifold nodes within the wider web.

Other interviewees had developed more diverse interests, marking out broader webs, of which PoV was just one part. For SS2.5 this was in part by default. He had become an alcoholic and under the auspices of Alcoholics Anonymous achieved, at the time of interview, sobriety. The "Twelve Step" method taught at AA meetings had provided him with a preliminary connection to New Age spiritualities (just as it had for interviewee SS1.13 from *The Spark* sample).

What I was convinced about was the mindset of it all, I mean I keyed right into it. There's this prayer at the beginning, "Give me the serenity to accept the things I can't change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference". That's an old hackneyed prayer, but I only really understood when I went to that group. (SS2.5)

His network of friendships had become solely those for whom spirituality is, in William James's terms, a "live option": "All the people that I'm attracted to ... are contemplative and thoughtful and spiritual. All of them, without exception. I don't spend any time with people who aren't prepared to look inward a bit". Yet his own web of relationships with New Age spiritualities was largely informal, with PoV representing the main formal node or organisation with which he was connected.

Other interviewees and respondents to the questionnaire had evolved considerably larger webs linking them to New Age spiritualities. For SS2.3, PoV workshops were one amongst several workshops in which

she had participated. Other nodes with which she had become involved were Sri Chinmoy meditation sessions, Soul Creativity seminars and art workshops. A local (Bristol) group, which meets once a week convenes the art workshops, and according to the interviewee, deals with issues related to spirituality and "mother earth". Her web spreads, as many within New Age spiritualities claim, beyond material and measurable pathways to more ephemeral realms where the notion of connection retains a meaning on the level of spiritual energies. Thus she defines a sense of spiritual balance, "in this more expansive mode I see everyone as spiritual". From this position she claims, "I can catch glimmers of the spirit":

Normally I have a little table or altar to help me, remind me to have a focus. I'll sit or light candles or offer something from nature that represents nurturing for me ... shells, pictures, sometimes of people that I want to think of ... to remind me to key in, to tune in, to connect.
(SS2.3)

For many within New Age spiritualities in general, and specifically for some amongst the PoV sample, the spiritual web of connections has a vitality and significance equal to webs within material realms. One interviewee's description of spiritual journey and the attributes of the spiritual person exemplifies this ephemeral mode of webs. From her perspective every interaction she has is included in a spiritual web of life:

New Age ... seems like it's part of everyday life ... spirituality always has been ... it's our journey out of the mud up to the heavens ... some are more spiritual because they've had more reincarnations. [Spirituality is about] people who really want to help other people.

They have such a strong centre that they just endlessly give out and it seems to come from an inexhaustible supply ... so they end up forming groups where this can keep happening, where people can "plug in" ... I think service is a big part of it ... once that connection upwards is established it automatically turns into helping other people.

My list of gurus is getting bigger and bigger ... you realise that everybody is there to help you and teach you. I have guides who come to me in dreams, who give me advice or who are leading the way. (SS2.16)

Thus there are many layers to the interconnections which I have termed webs. There are evident material organisations and groups that interact with each other using recognised formal mediations through paper and electronic systems. There are equally less formal interconnections that are supported by word-of-mouth communications, webs that I have designated as informal. These connections are less clearly evident and are difficult to track in any quantitative sense. It is possible merely to provide "extracts" from the informal pathways which interlink nodes in these informal webs. For those within the New Age spiritualities, there are modes of connection which are just as concrete, though they are less easy to determine for the outsider. These modes are the spiritual threads that interconnect human persons with non-human persons or "guides". The spiritual and material realms are interpenetrating in this worldview. The web is then comprised by the relationship between individual psyches and a universal spirituality. But of this further realm even the subtlest qualitative research can have little to say and, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, thereof one is necessarily silent.

PART IV

CONCEPTUAL EVALUATIONS

CHAPTER 8

RE-EVALUATION OF SPIRITUALITIES IN THE NEW AGE

All who research the New Age movement appear to agree on one issue: namely, that its diverse components make it extremely difficult to characterise in a final, decisive manner. (Paul Greer, 1995: 151)

It sounds like a mish-mash, and it is. It's like making a big pot of soup - boil it all up and in the end you've got something gorgeous. And you don't know how and you don't know why, it just is ... It ended up with me having a sense of how everything was connected and how everything did make sense in a very paradoxical way. (SS1.13)

There is this arrogance that man has had in the twentieth century that says, "I can do anything and everything". And of course the very nature of that means that they must leave religion behind, that you've cut the last cord with religion ... Spirituality now says, "If you want to retie those cords you can, but you don't have to tie them to what was in the past, something that was destined to be corrupt and controlling" ... people don't want control now. (SS2.7)

8.1 PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEW AGE

8.1.1 Where Webs Dissipate

Gordon Melton offers three reasons for the decline of the New Age Movement (1988: 51). The first is based on his understanding that there is a unified worldview of the New Age Movement. This worldview, according to Melton, is a synthesis of contemporary science and "traditional occult/metaphysical teachings" (51). The problem, asserts Melton, is that "as science continues to change, the New Age synthesis

will simply fall apart" (51). The second feature of the dissolution of the New Age is that certain aspects of the movement have been more successful than others in retaining members, "taking the primary religious commitments of large segments of the movement away from the movement as a whole" (51). The consequence of this effect will be the development of "definite structured patterns" which will become "long-term religious institutions", while other elements will fall away and disappear. It seems clear that Melton is assuming (with some historical validity) the growth and emergence of aspects of a New Age religion along lines similar to that of other traditional religious groupings. He does not explicitly refer to the theory here, but a Weberian perspective on the development of sects and denominations is implied in his analysis.

The problem with such deductive methods is, as Hume pointed out, simply that carrying out a procedure many times does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the same results will occur every time. Church-sect-denomination typologies may not be wholly applicable to the New Age spiritualities. It is likely that the spiritualities of the New Age pertain not to historical models of religious institutions, but to strands in the history of ideas, which change according to their specific contemporary expression. The third reason Melton offers for the decline in the New Age Movement is the internal inconsistency created by welcoming "a large number of entrepreneurs" into the movement. These "product providers must enter the world of cut-throat competition, a world

wholly at odds with the co-operative, one-world ideal espoused by the movement" (51). The market mentality has, according to Melton "weakened the movement".

But two questions are begged by this argument. The first is, what does Melton consider constitutes the "New Age Movement"? His description seems to assume a unified structure, albeit one he defines as a "network" (43), which is rather fixed in its identity. The assumption of a monolithic structure and the lack of dynamism are quite at odds with the fluctuating polymorphic collection of identities and networks I have defined as New Age spiritualities. The second question is, over what time period is the "disintegration" and "crumbling" of this movement going to occur? I have chosen Melton's analysis here to exemplify a particular perspective on the notion of a New Age Movement. The criteria by which scholars have categorised and conceptualised the New Age have their own historical contexts. The reflexivity of modernity perceives present conditions as historical structures, even as they are enacted. The corollary product of this reflective culture criticism is the development of labels and categories for historical movements. The consequent problem, however, is that these categories become outmoded even as they achieve currency, and contemporary cultural history becomes a great churning of novelty concepts: modern to postmodern to post-postmodern; New Religious Movements to New New Religious Movements (cf Clarke's explanation of the differentiations between Japanese NRMs, 1999: 197ff). Yet the concept of a uniform

New Age Movement is no more than a *synthetic* category, especially if we apply it to the manifold phenomena of New Age spiritualities today. Perhaps it was no more than a cloak masking a massive diversity of beliefs and practices with a false unity, even when Melton wrote his "history" of the movement, thirteen years ago.

We need, however, to recollect Arnold Toynbee's criterion for the authenticity of a religion, time. (1956: 296; cf chapter 1). Melton cites the key roots of the New Age as Movement from the 1960s. By his reckoning the New Age Movement is thirty-five years old - is this old enough to make a claim for Toynbee's authentic religion? Perhaps this is too short for the New Age to be compared with the histories of the major world religions. But Melton himself asserts "the New Age Movement has deep roots in Western culture" (35). It is a point taken up and developed at length by Wouter Hanegraaff in his consideration of New Age as a form of western "esotericism in the mirror of secular culture" (1996), that is, a specific expression of esoteric traditions inflected by the contemporary "cultic milieu". If the New Age phenomena are no longer best considered as a movement, how are they best described in their current form?

It may be useful to consider the webs of New Age spiritualities in terms of Ilya Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures. The New Age spiritualities may not be subject to entropic collapse, nor consigned by Melton to the "dustbin of history", as Trotsky did to the Mensheviks. Instead, the New Age spiritualities are an emergent structure in which internal instabilities bring about not collapse, but structures of a "higher

order". That is to say it was, for a period, useful and accurate to describe a New Age Movement. There has been some dispersal of its existence as a concrete movement. But rather than disappearance, there have been transformations of the phenomena of the New Age. It is now more useful and accurate to describe them in terms of a set of spiritualities founded on diverse practices and linked by weblike networks, as a web of New Age spiritualities.

Furthermore, it is likely that the term "New Age" has a distinct life-span as a meaningful phrase labelling a current form of religiosity. The contemporary specific meaning and use of "New Age" will pass into history. The term will become a historical flag for a discrete element of post-technological western culture. But that which it once described may not be so circumscribed by historical terminology. Arthur Lovejoy's recognition of a variety of ideas that could be bound up in their many adaptations, by a single theme, the "great chain of being", is applicable to the concept of the *philosophia perennis* which underlies many New Age spiritualities. The mystical spirituality of the New Age spiritualities, which has both apophatic and cataphatic forms, could be conceived as a historical trace of the *philosophia perennis*. That which truly dissipates and melts into air is the cultural specificity, the expression of the *milieu*. That which is solid is not static, it is a transformative solidity, temporally located in contemporary forms. The New Age spiritualities are then a relative manifestation (just as is the phrase itself) of a more fundamental and a-historical relationship between human, natural and divine. Of

course, this last statement can only be putative, grounded as it is, in its own historically specific formulation.

8.1.2 Narcissism and Consumerism

The combined criticisms of narcissism and consumerism as essential elements of New Age are evaluated here in two ways: first in terms of the cogency of the arguments adduced; second in terms of the evidence. My analysis shows that both arguments and evidence require re-evaluation.

New Age spiritualities have developed in a post-technological world led by consumer-capitalism. This material fact influences the contemporary formations of these expressions of religiosity. A number of scholars of the New Age have related key elements of consumer-capitalism with certain features, which are perceived to be central aspects, of New Age spiritualities. New Age spiritualities then become reflections of capital and societal processes and, to some extent, necessarily exhibit the essential functions of monetary and social exchange.

Studies of the relationship between material conditions and religious formations are, however, by no means new. The first critical academic investigations into the relationship between capitalism and religion began in the twentieth century with Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) and Troeltsch's *Protestantism and Progress* (1912). Clearly Marx's earlier, nineteenth century analysis of industrial society and religion as a historical tool of oppression, the result of alienation in a class society, implicates religion with capital. Yet

the explicit relation and structured study of religious consciousness and principles, specifically Calvinism and English Puritanism, in relation to the genesis and current functions of capitalism is one of Weber's contributions to the sociology of religion.¹ Following this insight, into the contiguous morphology of Protestantism and capitalism, the relationship between religions in general and their financial foundations has become a standard dimension of scholarly analysis, especially of the New Age. Paul Heelas' description of New Age as "spiritual materialism", (1996: 30) and his study of "Prosperity and the New Age Movement: the Efficacy of Spiritual Economics" (1999) are two recent examples of this approach.

It is a truism to recognise that all the religions operate within a capitalist world. It is equally obvious that these operations necessarily require professional services related to capital. From a local or diocesan level to international umbrella organisations the major world religions have a significant impact on the movement of capital. They influence local and national communities in decisions regarding distribution of funding. In order to function religious organisations require capital. Now, while religious organisations require financial bases, this does not lead either to the statement that religions in some way give rise to capitalism or to the inverse proposition that capitalism is an essential element of the

¹ R. H. Tawney, in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1922), attributes the first investigations to Weber and Troeltsch (211; 311-313). Tawney is, however, uncompromising in his critique of the lack of historical understanding displayed in Weber's critique: "Both 'the capitalist spirit' and 'Protestant ethics' ... were a good deal more complex than Weber seems to imply" (313).

religions. In fact, for many religions monetary exchange has historically been explicitly defamed and considered the work of Mammon.

Financial activity is a structural element of the ways in which religious organisations are constituted and the ways in which they function in the world. However, monetary issues are often conceived in terms of a certain instrumentality within religious discourse, they are seen as means to justifiable ends. One of the key developments of late twentieth century capitalism is the emergence of consumerism and this element of capital culture has been the basis for a number of critical responses to the financial operations of especially New Age organisations.

The critical perspectives are on two levels: firstly that the cultural milieu of late twentieth century consumerism is a foundation for the philosophical approaches of New Age eclecticism; secondly, that New Age organisations, above other religious groupings, especially partake of consumerist culture. That is to say, for those who criticise New Age phenomena on both levels, New Age spiritualities are seen as products of late twentieth century capitalism and examples *par excellence* of capitalist aggrandisement. Foremost of these critics is Steve Bruce. Bruce's staunch defence of secularisation is outlined elsewhere in this thesis (cf chapter 1) and is a core aspect of his definition of New Age as a form of consumerism. "Rather than see the New Age as an antidote to secularisation, it makes more sense to see it as a style and form of religion well-suited to the secular world" (2000: 235). This means for Bruce, that "the New Age is important not for the changes it will bring but

for the changes it epitomises." (234). New Age then, for Bruce, exemplifies secular society that is irredeemably consumerist:

The assumptions of the New Age fit well with a society which is short on authority and long on consumer rights. In the free market for consumer durables, the autonomous individual maximises his or her returns by exercising free choice. In the free market for ideas, the individual New Ager maximises his or her free choice and synthesises his or her best combination of preferences. (2000: 231)

Yet this analysis is too simple, it is akin to Stark and Bainbridge's "exchange theory" whereby individuals' religious commitment is measured in terms of rewards and costs (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980; 1985: 172-3). Many people do not operate with this conscious self-serving mentality. It is indeed true that there is more of a free market of ideas in late modernity, but it is questionable whether individual choices are solely the product of maximising personal returns, as Bruce suggests. There are other vital issues in terms of choice, which are equally evident in individuals' preferences that include family, duty, social convention, financial security and social grouping. Indeed, diaspora studies indicate the necessity of paying close attention to the specificities of cultural heritage, education, historical particularity and geographic placement when considering how individuals practice their religions (Hinnells, 1997: 682-689).

The same factors need to be considered when engaging with the kinds of spiritual practice and ideas adopted by individuals within the New Age spiritualities. Ultimately analyses such as Bruce's are reductive in a

wholly limiting sense for academic enquiry. Human agency is significantly more complex than neo-Dawkins approaches that pursue a causality based on a single phenomenon or ascribed characteristic such as the "selfish gene" (cf Dawkins, 1976).

The charge that New Age is excessively interested in financial matters also emerges from other quarters. Graham Harvey approaches the New Age with excoriating derision:

Channelling of alleged wisdom from exalted masters, angels, devas and others is typical of New Age and causes considerable cynicism among Pagans, who feel that if New Agers faced their darkness honestly, they could admit that the "airy-fairy, wishy-washy" messages about being nicer people with more positive thoughts come from their own egos. Spirituality is far more important in New Age than the ultimately illusory material world or existence. Ability to meet the exorbitant and prohibitive cost of New Age events enables its beneficiaries the degree of leisure necessary to indulge in continual self-absorption. (Harvey, 1997: 219-220)

Among Pagans there is a definition that differentiates them from the New Age, which they term "one decimal point". Expressed more concretely, the idea is that while a Pagan gathering or event might cost £50, a similar New Age event will cost £500. This, according to Harvey, "is emblematic of the New Age as a predominantly white middle-class phenomenon in which health and wealth are prime indicators of spirituality" (1997: 219).

But this is evidentially incorrect. For Harvey's description excludes minorities. It excludes in the act of description the very groups it

assumes to be representing. While the generalisation that the participants of New Age spiritualities are often white and middle-class is indeed substantially the case, it is equally true that participants are often women and there are many individuals from a multiplicity of racial and cultural backgrounds. If his description pertains only to majority generalisations, does this not mean Harvey should write that New Age ideas of health and wealth are purely the aspirations of white, middle-class women? Even if this description of New Age spiritualities was wholly accurate, it is not an advisable critical technique to denigrate a religious grouping on the basis of ethnicity and cultural background or gender.

But Harvey may counter that he is neither referring to aspirations nor to those who make them, his concern is that health and wealth are "indicators" of spirituality for the New Age. It is here that the claims of these generalisations are most substantively incorrect. My research offers a cogent response to such generalisations and reductions in the detailed analysis of the individuals, groups and organisations constituting New Age spiritualities.

Harvey seeks to describe New Age spiritualities as narcissistic and a product of consumer culture, in order to highlight the authenticity of Pagan practices. From this view the decimal point underlines the values of Pagan spirituality as classless against a notion of an inauthentic monetary and class-ridden spirituality amongst New Agers. However, using my research sample the actual indicators of spirituality amongst

New Age practitioners show different interests. These indicators can be considered as the values that predominate amongst those engaged with New Age spiritualities. In the Survey of Spirituality the responses to question 28, where respondents listed the five "most important beliefs or ideals in [their] spirituality", provide an evidential basis for the real "indicators of spirituality" (see Appendix C). There is no evidence from this sample that wealth is perceived as an indicator of spirituality. Healing has some clear resonances for the sample, but the notion is more complex than the simple physical health implied by Harvey. Health is conceived as a psychological and spiritual category as much as a physical issue. Equally, health is perceived by many within New Age spiritualities in holistic terms, as a consequence of multiple other, more fundamental indicators of spiritual life and practice.

In just the same way, wealth is often conceived as a product of deeper choices related to achieving success and happiness, which *may* lead to wealth. Thus, as indicators, health and wealth are too removed to accurately signify what Harvey proposes they do within and for the New Age. The claim of the New Age as spiritually superficial, with a notion of spirituality that is actually founded on a self-serving consumer-capitalist ethic, is an inverse of the real processes amongst most New Age spiritualities. That is to say, it is a superficial reading that considers health and wealth prime indicators of spirituality for those within the New Age, for it fails to grasp the deeper foundations, the essential ideals and values, espoused by individuals within New Age spiritualities. As Paul

Tillich observed, scholars often tend to consider their own religion at its most profound levels while describing other religions at their most superficial levels, or simply as “futile human attempts to reach God” (cited by Margaret Miles, 2000: 473).

8.1.3 Success Criteria of Psychotechnologies

Some criticisms of New Age training programmes repeat the notion that New Age spiritualities are narcissistic and merely products on the shelves of consumer culture. The emphasis of critiques in this case is not especially related to cost, but directed at the effective outcomes of these programmes. It is a criticism pertinent to all the psychotechnologies. Simply, the analysis focuses on the questionable success of these training programmes. There is an evidential gap between the claims made by certain psychotechnologies and the measurable consequences of taking these programmes. This is partly because results are frequently unquantifiable within a broad range of other social and economic factors.

Moreover, the issue of proving even general claims of the efficacy of psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic practices is problematic. The point is well illustrated by the comparison of two psychological models by Lawrence Lilliston and Gary Shepherd in their analysis of “New Religious Movements and Mental Health” (1999). They compare Freudian psychoanalytic theory with humanistic psychotherapy:

Many of the most important propositions of both of these theoretical approaches are essentially untestable

but have a sort of fascinating, internal validity that makes them quite appealing. Both types of theories, the psychoanalytic and the humanistic, posit 'deep' processes that are not overtly visible to others, but that are assumed to exist as powerful determinants of external behaviour. ... the very 'untestability' of these important propositions is part of their appeal: they simply cannot be proven wrong, and adherents are free to conjecture about what should be happening in the depths of an individual's personality according to their favourite theory. (1999: 131)

Glenn Rupert's analysis of American New Age training seminars highlights similar problems in assessing their value (1992). The experience of Pacific Bell Telephone Company provides an example of the problems encountered in the use of New Age training seminars. The management of Pacific Bell gave a highly positive response to the whole company training programme offered by Charles Krone. Krone bases his training on the work of Georges Gurdjieff, a well-known synthesiser of mystical traditions in New Age circles (Ferguson, 1987: 86; Heelas, 1996: 47; Sutcliffe, 2000: 25).

Upper level management was very satisfied with the results of the training. Meetings gained a better sense of direction, relations between managers improved, and productivity in company operations increased by 23 percent. (Rupert, 1992: 134)

However, despite these positive results the company employees were unhappy with the training and after an anonymous Public Utilities Commission investigation the training, originally set to cost one hundred and forty seven million dollars was stopped when only forty million had been spent. The proofs for psychological systems aimed at changing individuals and companies are notoriously difficult to ascertain.

The response of psychotechnologies, such as PoV, to these claims is an undifferentiated statement: "try it, if it works use it". While it lacks subtlety, and an un-theorised pragmatism can lead to dangerous consequences, this practical approach evidently has resonances for those who become course participants. Distinguishing the efficacy of these programmes is essentially a matter of what is meant by success and proof. Wittgenstein's perceptions that meanings of words depend upon predetermined criteria and context are more than linguistic niceties. The criteria of success for the participant of a PoV seminar may be as straightforward as the difference between emotional states of self-destructive gloom and expansive happiness. Proof, for the insider, may be found in improved relationships (many examples of "healed" relationships are given in a highly sympathetic article on PoV in *Kindred Spirit*, 2000, 53: 29-32). These may be insufficient criteria for an outsider or a sceptic or indeed a participant for whom these have not been the results of a PoV workshop. However, the large numbers of individuals and organisations participating in PoV seminars, and those of other psychotechnologies, offer some quantifiable basis for the claim that many people perceive that genuine benefits can be derived from these programmes. The circular argument could proceed endlessly with the assertion that these remain inadequate criteria by which to judge the success of psychotechnological processes.

Yet while the problem of proof remains unsolved, the response to undifferentiated claims that the New Age is essentially narcissistic and

consumerist is challenged and rebuffed by the findings of this thesis. The values and goals of the organisations and individuals studied in detail here do not conform to a simplistic reduction to the lowest common denominator of self-service and greed. On this level at least there is a need for some scholars and commentators to re-evaluate their assumptions about New Age spiritualities.

8.1.4 Responses to the New Age Spiritualities

It is not the place here to provide a literature overview of the many and wide-ranging responses to the New Age. There are a considerable variety of responses from religious insiders and scholars of religion, society and culture that can be placed along a scale that starts with active support and ends with ferocious denigration.² It is, however, useful in this re-evaluation of New Age spiritualities to briefly consider and give voice to a number of scholars whose criticisms have a substantive relation to themes raised in this thesis, in order to provide the necessary balance required for evaluation.³

Some of the most vigorous critiques of New Age thinking can be found in Robert Basil's collection of critical essays, *Not Necessarily the New Age: Critical Essays* (1988). These essays include Maureen O'Hara's

² Daren Kemp's study of "Christaquarians" is one example of a scholar and researched group sympathetic with New Age philosophies, (2001). Maureen O'Hara, Womens Studies professor and practising psychotherapist, is an example of a severe critic (1988).

³ The negative critiques summarised here are readings representative of many theorists responding to the New Age. They are not comprehensive by any means. Nor do they include perspectives emerging from specific religious traditions; cf Douglas Groothuis' vitriolic *Unmasking the New Age* (1986) from an evangelical Christian point of view.

criticisms of New Age as “pseudoscience and mythmongering”, (1988: 145) and also Alan MacRobert’s “New Age Hokum”. MacRobert is convinced that a large proportion of New Age publications amount to “crank literature”, and New Age scientific procedures are equally dubious. The techniques utilised in the study of paranormal phenomena are “cloaked in *noise*” or “fuzz” excluding the clarity of genuine scientific scrutiny. Furthermore such pseudoscientific claims of the paranormal often turn out to have been proven spurious long ago: “the pattern is common: A new paranormal claim turns out to be a very old one, debunked long enough ago for the debunking to have been forgotten” (MacRobert, 1988: 380).

Another paper in Basil’s collection is Al Seckel’s “A New Age of Obfuscation and Manipulation”. Seckel seeks to elucidate four reasons “for there being so much verbal obfuscation among New Agers”. The first is the “use of technical jargon in a popular format” in order to “impress the reader”. The second criticism is that “the meanings of words are subtly changed as a way to intimidate people”. The third cause of obfuscation is that “for many people obscurity equals profundity”. Finally, Seckel asserts, “a vast amount of New Age literature misappropriates scientific jargon ... to give the impression of scientific accuracy” (387-388).

A further critique of New Age thought, which is less inclined to discover conspiracies, though no less averse to certain decontextualised ideas of the New Age, is Harman Hartzell Bro’s “New Age Spirituality: A Critical

Appraisal" (1993). Bro cites a number of "excesses and extravagances" which he supports with examples of New Age practices. He lists these excesses as greed, manipulation, fraud, self-deception, doubtful morality, narcissism, trivialisation, stylised art and repetitious music. The aesthetic complaints of the final two criticisms bear no weight as genuine scholarly appraisals - aesthetics are culturally and historically specific, and Bro's opinions are no more or less valid than negative reactions to abstract expressionism and the music of Philip Glass or Steve Reich. Greed, fraud, doubtful morality, self-deception and narcissism are undoubtedly elements of the lives of some within New Age spiritualities. However, the results of the survey for this thesis and others like it (cf Rose, 1996) deny and empirically throw light on the false deduction that specific instances can be the basis for such general statements. Bro's other extravagances, manipulation and trivialisation, reiterate the criticisms of O'Hara, MacRobert and Seckel. They also resonate with other scholarly criticisms that purport to offer "true" readings against histories of mistaken, misconstrued, manipulated, trivialised or falsely appropriated conceptions of an author, concept or doctrine.

A related example is Robert Segal's statement in response to the widely perceived understanding that Jung was "pro-religion": "To read Jung in so upbeat a way is in fact to misread him. Jung comes, if not to bury religion, not to praise it either" (2000: 65). Who are we to believe, Segal or the upbeat readers? Which interpretation is true, Segal's non-religious Jung or the many who have found religious inspiration from

Jung, or indeed Jung's own claim that "we are at the threshold of a new spiritual epoch" (1933: 250)?

How might we respond to the criticisms of trivialisation, simplification and popularisation of scientific concepts? The adoption and adaptation of concepts is part of the creative process of developing human knowledge. It was Kuhn himself who applied his study of scientific revolutions and paradigm shifts to wider culture, just as did Prigogine with the notion of dissipative structures. Moreover, the relationship between "higher order" intellectual expressions of an idea and its popular rendition for a wider audience has always been tense, especially with regard to scientific discourse. Yet without imaginative applications we would not have such valuable and beneficial ideas as Goethe's translation of the chemical processes of elective affinities to human relationships. As Richard Tarnas has written, the wider cultural resonances of specific ideas, again particularly from the sciences, has had a great impact on postmodern worldviews:

Common to these new perspectives has been the imperative to rethink and reformulate the human relation to nature, an imperative driven by the growing recognition that modern science's mechanistic and objectivist conception of nature was not only limited but fundamentally flawed. Major theoretical interventions such as Bateson's "ecology of mind", Bohm's theory of the implicate order, Sheldrake's theory of formative causation, McClintock's theory of genetic transposition, Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures and order by fluctuation, Lorenz and Feigenbaum's chaos theory, and Bell's theorem of non-locality have pointed to new possibilities for a less reductionistic scientific worldview. (1991: 404-405)

Irving Hexham's scholarly response to the criticisms of New Age by many American evangelicals illustrates how claims about popularisation, trivialisation and over-simplification may backfire (1992: 152-163).

Hexham selected random passages from a number of best-selling New Age and Christian books to apply readability index analyses. "The results showed that while the average New Age book required a 'grade 14' reading level, Christian books were written at 'grade 9' level" (161).

I do not intend to deny the many valid criticisms of New Age beliefs and practitioners, of which even those summarised above are appropriate to certain aspects of New Age spiritualities. The focuses of my rebuffs are the critical techniques of global application of criticisms, generalisations and the assertion of universal understanding gleaned from specific instances. New Age spiritualities are multifaceted and there is no doubt certain of these facets are reprehensible as mendacious and fraudulent. The crucial point is that the pictures presented by a number of critics are not accurate for *all* New Age spiritualities as is evidenced by the research sample for this thesis, nor are they always accurate for the individual instances they purport to describe. Indeed all religions are multifaceted in similar ways to New Age spiritualities. The varied use of doctrines and rites that are applied in different ways across cultures and practised by individuals of differing abilities and interests is just one example of the *lack* of unified expressions within religious traditions.

It may be that the critical vehemence of those antagonistic to New Age spiritualities is tempered as time adds historical bulk to the phenomena,

and publications, both from within and without the New Age, add weight to its role as a significant aspect of contemporary religiosity. Certainly the approach adopted in this thesis, to highlight the cultural-historical and specifically religio-spiritual nature of New Age spiritualities, is an attempt to balance some of the polemic used in writing about New Age phenomena. Moreover, frequently the negative criticisms have focused on belief and ideology as the core referents for what constitutes New Age. Too often the significance of practices and the experiential dimension of individual practitioners' lives is overlooked or omitted.

8.2 PRAXIS PRIOR TO DOCTRINE

8.2.1 Practical and Experiential Spiritualities

There are many theoretical recognitions of the vitality of experience over theory in the history of western thought. One might begin with the Epicurean assertion of the highest value being placed in the search for human happiness and the rejection of pain and fear. In Epicurus' vision of the simple pleasures of the company of friends, and in the hedonism of debased Epicureanism, one might find roots for contemporary spiritual seekers "desperately searching for something". Yet despite multifarious historical roots there is a specifically modern understanding of the experience of this religious search. New Age spiritualities affirm a notion of praxis that entwines practices, psychotechnologies, healing methods and lifestyle choices with individual experience. While these practices

are founded on beliefs and doctrines in the relativised world of New Age spiritualities, action and experience have a higher value than doctrinal expressions as forms of knowledge. In this sense praxis precedes doctrine.

There are wider influences than merely the ideas emerging from New Age spiritualities on this reified understanding of religious experience and practice. Scholars such as William James and Rudolf Otto have had a considerable influence on approaches that bring experience to the foreground of research. James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) provided, alongside the work of James Leuba and Edwin Starbuck, a psychological impetus for the study of religion. But while his colleagues concentrated on a reductive paradigm of religious experience as material emanating from within the psyche, James affirmed the external reality of religion confirmed by religious experience. This is a conflict of views neatly paralleled by Peter Berger's response to Feurbachs religiosity as *projection*, by maintaining that the religious sense in human beings might on the contrary be a *reflection* of a real religious object (1969).

James's emphasis in *Varieties* and other papers, such as "The Will to Believe" (1896), is on a "live option" of religion that is something to be experienced to be believed. Thus the conclusion to *Varieties* arrives at the highest variety of religious experience, mystical experience. "The existence of mystical states", James writes, "absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of

what we may believe" (1902: 427). This leads us to recognise that, "the supernaturalism and optimism to which they would persuade us may, interpreted in one way or another, be after all the truest of insights into the meaning of this life" (428). The corollary conclusions, albeit implicit in James's remarks, are that to pursue the experience of mystical states is the highest ethical aim and will reveal the greatest truths about the religious life.

This theme of understanding plural religious expressions in terms of experience is explicitly developed in the phenomenological category of "the holy" in Otto's work (1923). Experience of the numinous is presented throughout *The Idea of the Holy* as the most profound and direct means of understanding the reality of God's presence in the world.

The approach to spirituality and experience taken by the Dalai Lama is more immediately influential and appropriate to New Age spiritualities. By considering the ideas of the Dalai Lama I am, however, selecting a voice that represents an understanding of experience "outside" New Age spiritualities. His perspective arises from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition yet his thinking is also a reflection of the *zeitgeist* of multiple religious perspectives that inform contemporary spirituality. Aldous Huxley, Marilyn Ferguson, Jiddu Krishnamurti and Ram Dass have influenced New Age conceptions of experience more directly,⁴ but perspectives on

⁴ In contemporary Christian spirituality one might identify the influences of the burgeoning translations, renditions and modern appropriations of mediaeval mystical treatises, or the work of Thomas Merton, Bede Griffiths and Matthew Fox in current notions of experience-led religiosity.

New Age spiritualities are increased by recognising wider cultural resonances. The notions of experience and praxis current within New Age spiritualities exist in a broader cultural background of contemporary spirituality. The Dalai Lama is authoritative and significant for the wider picture of contemporary spirituality in the postmodern world, a picture that includes New Age spiritualities.

While James and Otto provide strands in the weave of an increasingly individualistic trend in the notion of spiritual experience in western culture, the Dalai Lama approaches religious experience from another direction and tradition. Yet his emphasis is spliced into the individualist tendencies of contemporary spirituality and colours the whole with a contiguous formation, that of social engagement. This element of social and political awareness and action is a core aspect of the vitality of many New Age spiritualities. It is therefore misleading to overemphasise Heelas' description of the New Age Movement as a "Self-religion" (1996). Such a designation identifies the personalist aspect of New Age spiritualities as navel-gazing, but pays little heed to elements of social praxis, environmental responsibility and political involvements. Far worse, Steve Bruce's consideration of New Age religiosity as "low impact and low salience" is both quantitatively and qualitatively misleading.⁵ Some scholars have mis-recognised a narcissistic feature of modernity as focal in New Age practices and thought. While it is true that one of the outcomes of the intellectual history of Romanticism was an

increasing narcissism, identifiable in cultural phenomena as diverse as Camus' anti-hero "killing an Arab" in *L'Étranger* and the self-destructive journalist in Hunter S. Thomson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, these threads have little salience in the generality of New Age spiritualities or contemporary spirituality as a whole.

The social engagement that the Dalai Lama espouses incorporates the personalist episteme within a plural outward looking vision of the spiritual life. This view is most particularly evident in *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* (1998). The text is an outcome of discussions between the Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler, an American psychiatrist. While their analysis focuses on the idea of "self" and the individual path to happiness, this is achieved by "deepening our connection to others" (67-90), developing greater intimacy, and understanding a universalised concept of spirituality which allows for difference and uniqueness. Thus the Dalai Lama suggests that "each individual should embark upon a spiritual path that is best suited to his or her mental disposition, natural inclination, temperament, belief, family and cultural background" (248). In *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World: Ethics for a New Millennium* (1999) the Dalai Lama distinguishes between religion and spirituality further, affirming a conception of religion as doctrinal against "expressive spirituality and humanistic expressivism" (Heelas, 2000):

⁵ Ironically it is Heelas who has offered the most cogent riposte to Bruce's reductive analysis - see Heelas, 2000.

I believe there is an important distinction to be made between religion and spirituality. Religion I take to be concerned with belief in the claims to salvation of one faith tradition or another - an aspect of which is acceptance of some form of metaphysical reality, including perhaps an idea of heaven or *nirvana*. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, rituals, prayer and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit - such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony - which bring happiness to both self and others ... I sometimes say that religion is something we can perhaps do without. What we cannot do without are these basic spiritual qualities. (1999: 22-3)

These ideas of an ethical and socially responsible spirituality would seem to overthrow the constrictive definition of New Age spiritualities as a *bricolage* of "pick and mix" consumerism focusing on the material needs and greeds of the individual. It is apposite that *The Art of Happiness* is an engagement of eastern philosophy and religion with western psychiatric models and psychotherapeutic practice, both of which are foundations for many New Age spiritualities. The reflective, meditative practices of Buddhism especially are key features of the psychotechnologies developed in the Human Potential Movement, which is a cornerstone of New Age spiritualities.

In the histories that inform New Age spiritualities there are innumerable strands. The theoretical interest in the experience of religion, indicated by James and Otto, is expanded by the praxis-oriented spirituality of the Dalai Lama. But there are many other historical antecedents that set the practical conditions for spiritualities that affirm praxis before doctrine. From the Nietzschean *Twilight of the Idols* which signalled the death of

God, authority and a unitary tradition to feminist theological expressions of spiritual embodiment, popular religiosity has moved toward a direct, personal engagement with the divine in the world, encountered through personalised practices and individual experience. These themes are strongly evident in the webs of praxis explored in this thesis. For the New Age spiritualities emerge from the same conditions which have led to the significantly increased interest in spirituality in the contemporary world (King, 1997; Brown *et al* 1997; Van Ness, 1996). Yet the simple application of older models used in the study of religions to the phenomena of the New Age spiritualities has resulted in a number of inaccurate descriptions. This thesis is an attempt to remedy misrepresentations of New Age spiritualities and define them more accurately.

8.2.2 Web Thinking and New Age Spiritualities

A new model is required in order to conceive and define New Age spiritualities. It must be a conceptual model flexible and broad enough to encompass and accurately describe the social connections which locate praxis and experience and also show the networks linking individual to community in New Age spiritualities. The model adopted and developed in this thesis reflects the postmodern location of New Age spiritualities as networks within man-made and natural ecologies, as webs of connection between human, natural and divine. The web model is applied here to uncover the practical foundations of New Age spiritualities. The idea of multiple webs within webs is not thereby used

to obscure the significance of beliefs, but to allow a wider variety of perspectives of the New Age spiritualities. This conception brings to the fore praxis, yet encourages a view of multiple strands influencing the expressions of religiosity included in New Age spiritualities. What is specifically postmodern in this methodological process and conceptual definition is the plurality of descriptions that emerge. There is, ultimately, no final or absolute rendering of an essence or a singular New Age spirituality.

The web model is also a hypothesis competing with other hypotheses. It emerges from its own eclectic history of academic studies of religion, society and culture as well as from the New Age spiritualities themselves. A number of differing models have been applied to the phenomena comprised within the generic New Age. While some typological formulae have been adequate means of representing the specific area of study, it is often recognised, even by the scholars adopting a given methodology, that their model is flawed. Thus, in two recent instances that apply Greil and Robbins's (1994) notions of "quasi-religion" and "para-religion" to ostensibly religious or spiritual practices, we find self-conscious doubt by the scholars writing up their research.

Merlin Brinkerhoff and Jeffrey Jacob initially claim in a study on mindfulness and deep ecology (1999) that they are presenting "a theoretical framework that permits the heretofore discrete and disparate elements from the quasi-religious literature to be consumed under a conceptual rubric" (525), as expressed in figure 5.

FIGURE 5
A TYPOLOGY: RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND ITS PARALLEL
MANIFESTATIONS

		<u>Secular - Sacred Continuum.</u>	
		Secular Direction	Sacred Direction
<u>Organisational Dimension</u>	Formal	<div>Para-Religion</div> <div>1</div>	<div>Organised Religion</div> <div>2</div>
	Non-Formal	<div>Popular Psychology / Character Development</div> <div>3</div>	<div>Quasi-Religion</div> <div>4</div>

(Brinkerhoff and Jacob, 1999: 526)

However, they self-identify this very typology as a “parsimonious” means of expressing religious and religious-parallel experiences. The term “Organised Religion” in their sacred and formal box begs many questions regarding the nature of religion itself. Equally problematic for the typology is the secular enculturation of many “organised” religions in formal and non-formal ways. Thus, the typology quickly topples into meaninglessness. It is an abstract imposition by scholarly outsiders, which fails to accurately represent the complexity of religious and sacred phenomena.

Malcolm Hamilton offers a more subtle adumbration of “quasi-religion” in his discussion of vegetarianism (2000). Yet he also qualifies his adoption of the term:

Whatever the merits of terms such as “quasi-religion” and “para-religion” they can only serve as temporary devices in the absence of something better. Rather than rushing into the invention of neologisms they will serve reasonably well for the moment, but I shall argue later that we shall need better ones in the longer term.
(66)

The need for a more precise model with greater utility is evident. One way in which I have proceeded in outlining such a model is to understand the problems that led to the inadequacies of the present models. It is not the place here to describe the full history of the paradigms and models that brought about such a crisis of representation of New Age religions (cf chapters 1 and 2 for a fuller, though by no means comprehensive, analysis). It is possible, however, to polemicise certain themes of this history. Against this simplified structure one can pit the essentials of another paradigm of description, one which emerges at least in part from the very field it describes. Out of this dialectic, albeit a synthetic construction, it is possible to trace one strand in the development of web thinking. The web model emerges from this dialectic.

A framework of concepts that shapes some social scientific typologies of religion exists in the social world of Weber's disenchantments: rationalisation, secularisation, modernisation and routinisation. Thus we find that Roy Wallis's typology of three ideal types of New Religious Movements (NRMs), into which he subsumes New Age spiritualities, is a description of the “set of ways in which a New Religious Movement may orient itself to the social world into which it emerges” (1984: 4). The

social world, which is “rejected”, “affirmed” or “accommodated” by the NRMs, is paradigmatically constructed by Weberian and post-Weberian social factors, which include the defining features of post-industrial society: commercialisation; globalisation; commodification; narcissism. Set against this social world, New Age spiritualities are seen in part as reaction and in part as defined by such overarching themes. Yet, as I have tried to show through my research, those within the New Age spiritualities *do not* construct the same social world.

Many of the ethical and political motivations of such spiritual believers are adopted and presented as alternatives to perceived negative social pressures - in this way typologies which categorise reaction as fundamental do accurately reflect a particular aspect of New Age spiritualities. However, there are other social and historical concepts that influence the worldview of those who define themselves as spiritual. Researchers must be aware of the crucial point that spiritual believers orient themselves to a different social world than that constructed by many academic observers. Thus greater reflexivity is required in assumptions about social reality, as Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman warn:

the representation of ‘reality’ in a cultural context which acknowledges multiple possible realities is not just an ‘academic’ issue, for there are issues of legitimacy and power involved in whatever definition of ‘normative’ is counted as authoritative - and in who makes that judgement. (2000: 3)

A more accurate representation of New Age spiritualities needs an insider perception of the practices, concepts and beliefs influencing the spiritual paradigm of reality. My artificial polemic, which has empirical roots in real individuals' testimonies, has defined a set of "negative" themes, against which alternative, "positive" themes can be set. These positive alternatives, for those within the New Age spiritualities, conform to a vision of seismic cultural change - a paradigm shift of Kuhnian proportion. The change, in essence, is from a culture that embraces materialism to one which affirms spirituality. Russell Di Carlo, predicts "a shift from seeing the universe as a mechanical device with no mind or will of its own, to seeing it as intelligent, self-organising and ever-evolving" (1996: 11). Such optimism may not be evident in all New Age spiritualities, but the assumption that spirituality underlies materiality, whether in terms of a divine will or a more amorphous energy, is common to all New Agers. Thus social interaction and the process of historical change, the social world, are constructed by a paradigm quite at odds with the Weberian paradigm. Belief and praxis are inflected by this central paradigm, and an observer's model should accommodate this worldview if it is to accurately represent it.

The idea of the web has come forth both as a model and a way of thinking about the specific plurality of New Age spiritualities. As a model it comprises individual and group networks and can be applied to disclose doctrine, belief and intellectual history, while its focus is on living tradition, praxis and experience. As a way of thinking, web

methodology allows the scholar to assert multiplicity and engage with the complexity of investigating manifold phenomena. Web thinking is explicitly anti-reductive. It is possible to refine and analyse individual nodes and points of linkage between webs, but these are always set against a many-layered background of other interconnecting webs of influence. Web thinking is also creative. It establishes a means by which the scholar can choose a valid field of interest and discover patterns of relationship that the closure of some other methodologies could not allow. Web thinking is not, though, arbitrary. Its functionality is that by comprehending that religions are aspectual, the manifold dimensions of religious phenomena can be studied both discretely and in inter-relationship. In terms of utility and accuracy web thinking provides a solid basis for examining not only New Age spiritualities, but a broad range of human and cultural phenomena.

The practical orientation of the phenomena of New Age spiritualities offers new challenges for scholarly research. One such challenge is the epistemological conflict between the relativist belief systems of New Age spiritualities and the fundamentalisms of traditional religions. It is a debate mirrored in the conflict between the arbitrary multiple traces of postmodern culture criticism and the progressivist absolute claims made in scientific discourse. Yet this epistemic debate is held on a familiar battleground which is bordered by concern with Truth, the assumption of hierarchies and rights of authority, and the focus on text, doctrine and ideas. A novel situation is presented by praxis and web-based research;

there is no absolute authority to arbitrate on boundaries or truth claims. For what is discovered in the minutiae of drawing out the individual webs, if we concentrate on doctrine alone, is a myriad of belief systems, some of which are incoherent, self-refuting and certainly at odds with other webs of belief. The connection between webs can be established instead by their structural similarity. Thus, if a core impetus for the spiritual pilgrims of New Age spiritualities is practical engagement, then their manifold practices should become the phenomena of investigation before beliefs, and praxis becomes the category of identification prior to doctrine. The most effective means of rendering this mode of religiosity, while maintaining the validity of other aspects, including a doctrinal perspective, is to use the model of the web.

CONCLUSION

Now it appears to me that almost any man may like the spider spin from his own innards his own airy Citadel - the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean - full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wanderings, of distinctness for his luxury. But the minds of mortals are so different and bent on such diverse journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under such suppositions ... Man should not dispute or assert, but whisper results to his Neighbour, and thus by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and humanity instead of being a wide heath of furze and briars, with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a great democracy of forest trees. (Keats cited in Mascaró, 1965: 23-24)

We often discover that what we once thought a novel perception is simply an old idea refurbished for a new context. For some people this realisation leads to a drab view of human history in which we are circumscribed by fixed attributes and for which there is no remedy. For other people the eternal return of core themes in human thought and aspiration is also a continual refreshing from the deep wellsprings of the absolute. The idea of the web, democratic pluralism in the study of religions, the reification of experience and praxis, the very spirituality that infuses New Age spiritualities, are all resonances of older expressions. In the conclusion to this thesis I will review what I have

examined and established in this investigation into the new expressions of New Age spiritualities.

In my research I have analysed the treatment of New Age spiritualities in academic studies and provided details of a new perspective in theory and fieldwork. There are four clear sections to the investigations carried out for this thesis:

1. My assessment of a number of studies related to the New Age led me to define a more conceptually refined methodology for research.
2. The model I adopted for examining New Age spiritualities is that of the web. I have used different conceptual and thematic tools to draw out this model.
3. The theoretical explanation of the web has been developed in tandem with empirical investigations into New Age spiritualities in the South West of England.
4. Both the theoretical and practical studies show how older models have been inadequate to describe the phenomena of New Age spiritualities, and demonstrate how effective the web model can be.

In reviewing the scope of the thesis, I will briefly assess the success of the project and investigate how some of the assertions included within the thesis may become foundations for further studies. For example, the web model could usefully be tested in other circumstances. Contemporary spirituality is an emerging field of religiosity and the spiritualities of traditional religions, such as Christianity and Buddhism for example, overlap with the webs of New Age spiritualities. Equally, the emphasis on experience and practice has methodological and practical implications for the study of religions. The major themes discussed and developed in my research are as follows:

The definition of a plural set of phenomena described as "New Age spiritualities".

New Age spiritualities as forms of knowledge that criticise other epistemologies.

Webs of praxis, and webs of other types of religious expression.

The material existence of nodes of New Age spiritualities in the South West of England and an empirical study of those who participate in these nodes.

The difference between formal and informal networks.

The values of social research methods and ethnomethodology. This includes establishing the criteria of accuracy and utility.

Of course these themes are bound up with each other, referring to and dependent upon the detailed framework of assertions made to support each claim. My assertion of the plural term *New Age spiritualities* may not achieve currency. The word spirituality implies, in its contemporary usage, a rather personal, and therefore multiple, concept of spiritual beliefs and practices. Spirituality in its singular form is used elsewhere to indicate various separate and defined expressions as in the series *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, and the *World Spirituality Series*. The term New Age, at the present, retains its location as a descriptor for an eclectic set of religious perspectives and practices that is recognised both by academic outsiders and insiders.

However, problems relating to the self-description of those who do not define themselves as New Age yet fit basic categorical aspects of the term remain. Daren Kemp's recent attempt to overcome the problems of the two categories "New Age Christians" and "Christian New Agers" with

the creation of a neologism "Christaquarians" does not seem adequate. Kemp recognises that manufactured terms which do not have a currency amongst the researched community are problematic, yet he proceeds with an analysis of a putative group of "Christaquarians" before establishing that they do not in fact exist (2001). The notions of New Age and spirituality exist independently and are frequently adjoined. I have not therefore created a synthetic concept. However, the term New Age *spiritualities* as I have used it may be too inclusive and beg the question as to what exactly is meant by and included within the rubric New Age spiritualities.

My assertion of the multiplicity of expressions of New Age spiritualities is a reflection of the cultural milieu that privileges the individual. I have rejected Heelas' notion of "Self-religions", but retained elements of the concept he attempts to enclose within the label as accurate, namely the focus on self-development as a trope in New Age spiritualities. The existence of an increased sensitivity to the individual and the personal spiritual self exists in the field. My research into multiplicity is, at the same time, resonant with a new scholarly awareness of difference and plurality in the study of religions.

In researching the relationships between nodes in the web, whether nodes as individuals or as organisations, I established a division between formal and informal networks. On the surface this distinction is clear. The formal network of *Psychology of Vision* for example can be said to include any activities that relate to its material dimension, that is

its public role as a business, the courses, events, professional consultancy and published material produced by the organisation. The informal network of this hub expands more broadly through the especially private and non-material dimensions of friendships and word-of-mouth connections. As a large node or hub in the web of New Age spiritualities *Psychology of Vision* can also be described as a matrix for multiple layers of interconnection between individuals interested in New Age spiritualities. But there are many degrees of interest, and the threads interlinking individuals, organisations, formal and informal webs are of differing degrees of strength and importance. Moreover, the distinctions between formal/informal and public/private become blurred when we consider the development of the magazine *friends helping friends* as part of the web of *Psychology of Vision*. It is officially (formally) endorsed by *Psychology of Vision* while, at the same time, it explicitly claims not to represent the views of this organisation (2000: 1).

The role of local free newspapers specialising in New Age related subjects as networking hubs also blurs the boundaries between informal and formal modes of communication. For while the public bases of these papers as sources for advertisements are evident, they emerge from a community base and function alongside informal word-of-mouth contacts in individual webs. Formal and informal modes interact.

Equally, at the micro-level of each individual person's unique web of praxis and beliefs, to distinguish between formal and informal connections is to apply criteria not wholly appropriate to the ways in

which the individual understands his or her spirituality. There is a considerable realm of research yet to be carried out in investigation of the webs at all levels within New Age spiritualities. *Psychology of Vision* and *The Spark* are just two examples of many equivalent hubs recently developed and expanding within the web of New Age spiritualities. There are also other hubs, such as the many retreat centres and host sites for New Age and related events, which could be usefully examined in order to expand our understanding of New Age spiritualities. Having established that the patterns of praxis and belief that exist in New Age spiritualities are webs, it may be useful to extend the concept of webs to other networks and in the process more strictly define the terms and categories of the web to create a typology or ideal type. The nature of New Age networks militates against such strictures, but it may be more applicable to other areas of research.

It was in response to the very simple questions, what should the product of my research do? and, how could the research be valuable to others? that I developed the criteria of accuracy and utility. The explanations of New Age spiritualities should be accurate primarily in terms of the scholarly project, but also in terms recognisable to the researched community. Merely restating mission statements from *Psychology of Vision* and *The Spark*, or simply quoting the interview data verbatim, is not the purpose of ethnography. Ethnography is interpretative and its value is its usefulness as much as its accuracy. The key question of "thick description", Geertz asserts, is not whether it is "a field journal

squib or a Malinowski-sized monograph, [but] whether it sorts winks from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones" (1973: 16).

Underlying the methods used in any research are implicit theories and assumptions that direct and actively model research process and research conclusions. The task of uncovering these assumptions was the core impetus in highlighting the theoretical foundations and bringing forth the methodological directions of this thesis. Foucault's role in unmasking the functions of power in knowledge is a significant addition to postmodern conceptions of epistemology. Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts is equally an important reflection upon epistemic claims. Both scholars have influenced the streams of academic inquiry far beyond the restricted fields of history, philosophy and history of science. The same is also true of feminist inquiries in the study of religions. The fact that women have a significant history in the patriarchal traditions of the religions and that scholars are recovering their voices has had widespread resonances, particularly in religious and spiritual discourse. As influences on my own intellectual history they are necessarily present in this thesis, especially in the consideration of New Age spiritualities as a form of knowledge or discourse, that criticises other epistemologies. Whether other scholars can perceive significant strands absent from this thesis, in terms of focus, is thus a moot point. Nevertheless, this is not to deny the usefulness of further studies that could concentrate perhaps on the vital influences of Nietzsche, or Shankara's *Vedanta* interpreted by Vivekananda, or D. T. Suzuki's expressions of Zen Buddhism on New

Age spiritualities. Nor is my selection of theoretical foundations to be considered a conclusive account of the theorists I use; they are readings taken as appropriate for the field of research. (A similar statement, of scholarly readings, can be made regarding the influences on the web model developed in chapter 3.) My own web of construction attaches only to certain elements of other webs, it does not fully encompass them.

The modes of New Age spiritualities offering alternative epistemologies and defining a critique of traditional epistemologies could very usefully be the basis for further research. It may be noted that all alternative epistemologies, or indeed religious traditions, offer often highly detailed and complex analyses of former epistemologies, so why isolate this as specific to New Age spiritualities? This is indeed the case, but in many studies New Age spiritualities have not been credited with the rigorous thinking asserted within this thesis. The recent work of Capra (1992, 1996, 1997-9) offers a coherent expression of this critique, but his is one amongst many voices (cf for example contributors to *Resurgence* including Matthew Fox, Satish Kumar, Thomas Moore, Jonathan Porritt, Vandana Shiva and Charlene Spretnak). Some research has been carried out in this area of philosophical, political, ecological and social activism, as for example Warwick Fox's work on "transpersonal ecology" (1990). But there remains a large field in which there exists much scholarly work, as is evidenced by the significant influence of courses run at the Schumacher College in the UK and Esalen Institute in the

USA, but little academic reflection on the role, position and theorising of those working in the field.

Perhaps the lack of recognition and research on the sophisticated philosophical aspects of New Age spiritualities are attributable to scholarly oversight. This could be because the focus of a number of scholars has been either on the social organisation of specific movements within New Age or on studies of specific religious beliefs. The webs of praxis are not adequately accounted for by these approaches, as has been argued throughout this thesis. A significant element of this praxis is a set of lifestyle choices. For many these amount to a kind of "soft" activism related to, for example, buying organic products and supporting social and political organisations (cf Survey of Spirituality responses to questions 23-24). For what might be termed the intellectual wing of New Age spiritualities, the elements of Kumar's "Soil, Soul and Society" are highly theorised beliefs. These beliefs are supported by sets of practices that cross boundaries into political and social spheres, sometimes without specific reference to religiosity or even spirituality. For many individuals within New Age spiritualities the divisions between science, society, politics and religion are false. This understanding has not been sufficiently recognised by many Religious Studies scholars who still work with outdated paradigms of the Christian western tradition that divide church and state. Overcoming this distinction underlies the current resurgence of spirituality perceived as praxis and the notion of spirituality in everyday life: which stands

opposed to religion perceived as doctrine and beliefs divorced from actions.

From within New Age spiritualities, and other areas of human expression, voices can be heard which demand that human knowledge is more than theoretical study can circumscribe. Other knowledges may be performative and active. Spiritualities are knowledges of experience and commitment within eclectic frameworks of belief. The personal religiosities of those within New Age spiritualities assert that knowledge is experiential, doctrinal and relational.

The quest of Religious Studies is to reflect these modalities; to cross the insider/outsider boundary and express religious understanding as the practitioner does without damaging other understandings and other practitioners. That is the dilemma of pluralism, and it is the aim of the Religious Studies scholar to account for it. One way of beginning is to recognise that this aim requires a prior perception of the unique value of each individual's pathway. This thesis has defined many individual pathways using the collective structural model of the web. The networks of New Age spiritualities affirm our understanding of human uniqueness and also human interdependence. Keats, when only twenty-two years old, addressed this very perception with the assertion that "every human might become great, and humanity instead of being a wide heath of furze and briars, with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a great democracy of forest trees" (cited in Mascaró, 1965: 24).

My investigations into New Age spiritualities recognise the diversity and individual distinctions of the field. My research also shows that there is a model for mapping the territory. The web model works at micro and macro levels. Individuals' pathways between multiple religious traditions, as they adopt, engage with, and discard ideas and practices can be described using this model. The connections and networks of organisations are also amenable to the structure of the model. My empirical study provides concrete examples of the many ways the threads connecting individuals and organisations are made. New Age spiritualities are a vibrant form of contemporary religiosity, and their dynamic webs extend into postmodern culture with renewed expressions of spirituality and creativity.

SURVEY OF SPIRITUALITY

Dear Course Participant,
Your help would be gratefully appreciated in completing this questionnaire. It is the first survey of its kind in the South West and you will be making a valuable contribution to knowledge of people's ideas about spirituality and how the networks of information work. The research is part of a sincere investigation being carried out by a research student at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Bristol University. Jeff Allen (Psychology of Vision) generously supports this project and the findings will be shared with him.
We hope you will participate in this important project and that you will enjoy completing the questionnaire. All respondents will be completely anonymous - so feel free to express your opinions in the spaces provided. Please circle the responses which are right for you, and write comments in the spaces. Every question counts, so please try to complete all the sections. Thankyou for your help.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Q1. Would you consider yourself to be a spiritual person?
YES NO

Q2. In your opinion, are there various types of spirituality - eg New Age spirituality, Buddhist spirituality, Christian spirituality - or is spirituality universally the same?
VARYING TYPES THE SAME

Q3. In a few words describe what you mean when you use the word "spirituality"
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q4. Are you actively pursuing a spiritual path?
YES NO

Q5. Do you meditate?
YES NO

If YES, how often?
MORE THAN ONCE A DAY
OCCASIONALLY ONCE A DAY
EVERY FEW DAYS

Q6. What spiritual discipline(s) or teaching has had the greatest influence on your life? (Please state/list)
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q7. Is there any difference between being religious and being spiritual?
YES NO
Please explain
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q8. Are you a member of any traditional religious group (eg Christian, Muslim, Sikh)?
YES NO
If YES, please state which
.....

Q9. How do you pursue/develop your spiritual path?
WORKSHOPS LECTURES
ALONE RETREATS
FESTIVALS IN FORMAL GROUPS
INFORMALLY WITH FRIENDS
NONE OF THESE

Q10. How many of the following types of events (approximately) have you visited in the last 12 months in order to develop your spirituality?
WORKSHOPS LECTURES
RETREATS FESTIVALS
FORMAL GROUP MEETINGS
Please give examples

Q11. Do you follow a particular spiritual teacher or teaching?

YES NO

If YES, please state name(s)

.....
.....

..
Q12. Do you follow more than one teaching, or teacher at a time?

YES NO

Q13. In what way would you say that adopting these ideas and practices might have positively changed your life?

No change More spiritual
More responsible More pleasurable
More self-empowered More playful
Happier More healed
More meaningful More fulfilled
More loving More giving
Other (please state)

.....
.....

Q14. Have there been any negative changes? (Please state)

.....
.....
.....
.....

.....
Q15. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of this planet?

OPTIMISTIC PESSIMISTIC

Q16. Do you feel that humanity is in the process of a major transformation?

YES NO

Q17. Would you describe any of your views as "New Age"?

YES NO

If NO, how would you describe your beliefs (eg Alternative, New Era, Radical)

.....
.....

.....
Q18. In a few words please describe what you think the New Age is?

.....
.....
.....
.....

....
Q19. Do you believe there has been a rise in New Age ideas and practices in the last few years?

YES NO DON'T KNOW

If YES, then have you any ideas what might be causing a rise of New Age ideas (Please state)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q20. How do you communicate with other like-minded people? Do you,
Talk informally Go to meetings
Write to/for magazines/books
Keep quiet about your beliefs
Other (eg in your work, or by making art)

.....
.....

Q21. Do you think it is important to share your spiritual beliefs?

YES NO

Q22. One commentator has labelled the New Age Movement as the "Self-Religions". Is this a good description?

YES NO

Please explain
.....
.....
.....
.....

....
Q23. Are you a member of, or do you contribute to, any pressure group or alternative political organisation (eg Amnesty International, Green Party, Charter 88, Vegan Society, Friends of the Earth etc)?

YES NO

If YES please list organisation(s)

.....
.....

Q24. To what extent do you consider yourself to be "green" (Please ring one number on a scale 0-9)

NOT GREEN TOTALLY GREEN
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
9

Q25. Which of the following are important parts of your spiritual beliefs?

Channeling New Age Science
Healing and Personal Growth
Neo-paganism Ecology
New Psychology Eastern Religions

Q26. Is the idea of a God or Goddess important in your spirituality?

YES NO

Please state how you refer to this ultimate being

.....
Q27. Is the approaching Millennium significant in your beliefs?

SIGNIFICANT NOT SIGNIFICANT
PARTLY SIGNIFICANT

Q28. Please list the 5 most important beliefs or ideals in your spirituality (they need not be ranked in order)

Q29. Would you please name individuals whose ideas have had an important influence on your life:

BY CONTACT (Please list)

.....
.....
.....
.....

BY THEIR WRITINGS (Please list)

.....
.....
.....

Q30. In general, how do you find out about events related to spiritual and personal development?

POSTERS FLYERS
WORD-OF-MOUTH RADIO/TV
MAGAZINES/NEWSPAPERS

Q31. In general, how do you come across new ideas related to spiritual and personal development?

POSTERS FLYERS
WORD-OF-MOUTH RADIO/TV
MAGAZINES/NEWSPAPERS
BOOKS

Q32. Do you pass on information to other people about new, exciting ideas?

ALWAYS SOMETIMES NEVER

Q33. Do you tell other people about exciting courses/lectures/workshops or personal experiences which you have been involved in?

ALWAYS SOMETIMES NEVER

Q34. How important is it for you to share your ideas and experiences with other people?

NONEEDTOSHARE

SOMENEEDTOSHARE

IMPORTANT TO SHARE

If you feel there is any need to share please explain why you believe this

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q35. Which in your experience, have been the most effective means for sharing information about spiritual ideas and events?

POSTERS FLYERS

WORD-OF-MOUTH RADIO/TV

NATIONAL PAPERS BOOKS

LOCAL PAPERS LOCAL EVENTS

NATIONAL GATHERINGS

OTHER (Please specify)

.....
.....

~~~~~  
Would you please provide some facts about yourself:

Are you MALE FEMALE  
PARTNERED SINGLE

What is your age? UNDER 18

18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54

55-64 OVER 65

What is your approximate annual income?

UNDER £5,000 £5,000-£9,999

£10,000-£14,999 £15,000-£19,999

£20,000-£29,999 OVER£30,000

What is your occupation (Please state)

.....  
The information given in this questionnaire is confidential. However, if you feel able to answer a possible further set of questions (!) I would appreciate a contact address and number - thankyou.  
.....  
.....

Tel:.....  
THANKYOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY. PLEASE FOLD THE FORM AS INDICATED, AFFIX A STAMP AND POST. NO ENVELOPE IS REQUIRED. YOUR HELP AND TIME IS VALUABLE AND MUCH APPRECIATED.



**Appendix B**

**Important Influences on the Sample**

A simple number count of individuals and publications who were cited in the Survey of Spirituality questionnaire as influential, in response to question 29, is given below. The great variety and low incidence of repeated names indicates the diffusive nature of spiritual practices and interests within New Age spiritualities. This diversity is in accord with the multivocal polycentric notion of multiple networks. It also represents the extraordinary growth in the New Age market, in publications especially. In 1994 Mike Considine and Andrew Ferguson produced a study of the New Age market which showed considerable expansion in the products available for those involved in New Age spiritualities. They estimated, “3 million therapy clients, 2.5 million magazine readers, 300,000 workshop participants and ... 3.5 million books tapes and other products”. They concluded that “a reasonable figure for the hard core membership of the New Age market [in the UK] is 4.5 million people, 10% of the adult population” (1994:160). It should also be noted that the low incidence of repeated names exemplifies a diversity in the sample as well as the proliferation of spiritual, New Age self-help texts currently available.

| <u>By Contact</u> |   | <u>By their Writings</u> |   |
|-------------------|---|--------------------------|---|
| Chuck Spezzano    | 6 | Bhagwan Rajneesh/Osho    | 6 |
| Friends           | 6 | Louise Hay               | 6 |
| Christ            | 2 | Chuck Spezzano           | 6 |
| Jeff Allen        | 2 | Kahlil Gibran            | 5 |
| Teachers          | 2 | C S Lewis                | 4 |

| <u>By Contact</u>     |   | <u>By their Writings</u> |   |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------------|---|
| Charles Paul Brown    | 1 | M Scott Peck             | 3 |
| Leo Rutherford        | 1 | Richard Bach             | 3 |
| Children              | 1 | Carl Rogers              | 2 |
| Partner               | 1 | Krishnamurti             | 2 |
| Father                | 1 | Marianne Williamson      | 2 |
| Buddha                | 1 | Quakers                  | 2 |
| Elizabeth Kubler-Ross | 1 | Carl Jung                | 2 |
| Diana Cooper          | 1 | Lao Tse                  | 2 |
| Mother Meera          | 1 | Julia Cameron            | 2 |
| Babaji                | 1 | Dalai Lama               | 2 |
| Kim Coe               | 1 | Barbara Brennan          | 1 |
| Robert D'Aubigny      | 1 | Susan Jeffers            | 1 |
| Gabrielle Roth        | 1 | Bible                    | 1 |
| Kathryn Gilbank       | 1 | Dan Millman              | 1 |
| Roger Ford            | 1 | Caroline Myss            | 1 |
| Kaye Solisti          | 1 | Rumi                     | 1 |
| Krishnamurti          | 1 | Celestine Prophecy       | 1 |
| Maggie Peters         | 1 | Elisabeth Kubler-Ross    | 1 |
| Sacred Heart Nuns     | 1 | G. Larson                | 1 |
| Namgyal Rinpoche      | 1 | Mother Teresa            | 1 |
| Anamo                 | 1 | Sai Baba                 | 1 |
| Patrick Whitefield    | 1 | Carol Anthony            | 1 |
| E.P Thompson          | 1 | Marion Woodman           | 1 |
| Ram Dass              | 1 | Esther Harding           | 1 |
| Elizabeth Hinn        | 1 | Annie Wilson             | 1 |
| John Deruiter         | 1 | David Cousins            | 1 |
| Richard Smith         | 1 | Dolores Cannon           | 1 |
| John Samways          | 1 | George Trevelyan         | 1 |
| Ronan O'Conner        | 1 | T. C. Lethbridge         | 1 |
| Julia Perrier         | 1 | Ken Wilber               | 1 |
| Sangharakshita        | 1 | Steven Levine            | 1 |
| Maura Sills           | 1 | Christine Feldman        | 1 |
| Sheila Yeger          | 1 | Alan Watts               | 1 |
| Val Phillips          | 1 | Sheldon Kopp             | 1 |
| Musicians             | 1 | John Murray              | 1 |
| Mansukh Patel         | 1 | Sogyal Rinpoche          | 1 |
| Robin Hodgkin         | 1 | Yukid Mishima            | 1 |
|                       |   | Fritjof Capra            | 1 |
|                       |   | Erich Fromm              | 1 |
|                       |   | Ken Keyes                | 1 |
|                       |   | Stuart Wild              | 1 |
|                       |   | Karl Marx                | 1 |
|                       |   | Nachman of Bratslav      | 1 |
|                       |   | Nichiren Daishonin       | 1 |
|                       |   | Donald Neale Walsh       | 1 |
|                       |   | Paolo Coelho             | 1 |
|                       |   | A. A Milne               | 1 |

| <u>By Contact</u> |  | <u>By their Writings</u> |   |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------|---|
|                   |  | Medieval Mystics         | 1 |
|                   |  | Maya Angelou             | 1 |
|                   |  | Carlos Castaneda         | 1 |
|                   |  | Antoine de Saint-Exupery | 1 |
|                   |  | E. F Schumacher          | 1 |
|                   |  | Susie Orbach             | 1 |
|                   |  | R. Winnicott             | 1 |
|                   |  | Joni Mitchel             | 1 |
|                   |  | Shakti Gawain            | 1 |
|                   |  | Jan Phillips             | 1 |
|                   |  | Rupert Sheldrake         | 1 |
|                   |  | Mansukh Patel            | 1 |
|                   |  | Silver Birch             | 1 |
|                   |  | Bernie Siegel            | 1 |
|                   |  | Edgar Cayce              | 1 |
|                   |  | Eric Berne               | 1 |
|                   |  | Ernest Gellner           | 1 |
|                   |  | St. Augustine            | 1 |
|                   |  | George Fox               | 1 |
|                   |  | Thomas Aquinas           | 1 |
|                   |  | Tom Davies               |   |

NB Sample size: 60

## Appendix C

### Spiritual Beliefs and Ideals

The table below is constructed from the responses of the entire sample to question 28: "Please list the 5 most important beliefs or ideals in your spirituality (they need not be ranked in order)". The collection of concepts, beliefs, ideals and values is constructed on a thematic, rather than a typological, principle. I have attempted to represent the views of the research sample while organising them into loose groups of familial relationship. The phrases are taken from the responses of the sample, though they do not represent all the variations of phrasing. A number of the questionnaires did not have full lists of five important beliefs or ideals. My reading of some responses suggested they were repeating a similar theme, in which case I selected only one of the given ideas.

| Examples of Stated Beliefs/<br>Ideals/Values | Numerical<br>Incidence |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Love                                         | 17                     |
| Compassion                                   | 8                      |
| Happiness, joy                               | 7                      |
| Healing, self-healing                        | 7                      |
| Responsibility to the environment            | 6                      |
| Growth                                       | 5                      |
| Honesty                                      | 5                      |
| God is in us all, human as divine            | 5                      |
| Living in the present, perfection of present | 5                      |
| Peace                                        | 4                      |
| Kindness                                     | 4                      |
| Self-direction, personal responsibility      | 4                      |
| Use of visionary and personal experience     | 4                      |
| Miracles, Angels, Spirits                    | 4                      |



| Examples of Stated Beliefs/<br>Ideals/Values | Numerical<br>Incidence |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| God created all that is                      | 4                      |
| Personal responsibility                      | 4                      |
| Creative action, art                         | 3                      |
| Equality                                     | 3                      |
| Forgiveness                                  | 3                      |
| Respect                                      | 3                      |
| Reincarnation                                | 3                      |
| Interconnectedness                           | 3                      |
| Generosity                                   | 3                      |
| Christian theology                           | 3                      |
| Acceptance, go with the flow                 | 3                      |
| Be true to self, self-knowledge              | 3                      |
| Suffering can be meaningful                  | 2                      |
| Eternal soul, spirit                         | 2                      |
| Clarity                                      | 2                      |
| Value of prayer                              | 2                      |
| Karma                                        | 2                      |
| Vegetarianism                                | 2                      |
| Unity of religions                           | 2                      |
| Humility                                     | 2                      |
| Community                                    | 2                      |
| Christ is within me                          | 2                      |
| Only perfection is real                      | 2                      |
| World citizenship, no national boundaries    | 2                      |
| Celebration of life, wonder                  | 2                      |
| Commitment                                   | 2                      |
| Innocence and openness                       | 2                      |
| Not to steal or kill                         | 2                      |
| Justice                                      | 1                      |
| Do not judge others                          | 1                      |
| No such thing as failure                     | 1                      |
| Harmony and balance                          | 1                      |
| Self approval                                | 1                      |
| Positive thought                             | 1                      |
| What you reap you sow                        | 1                      |
| Duality is illusion                          | 1                      |
| Impermanence                                 | 1                      |
| Recognition of dark side                     | 1                      |
| Treading lightly                             | 1                      |
| Observing the seasons                        | 1                      |
| Wisdom                                       | 1                      |
| Fulfilment                                   | 1                      |
| Redemption                                   | 1                      |
| Transubstantiation                           | 1                      |

| Examples of Stated Beliefs/<br>Ideals/Values | Numerical<br>Incidence |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Awareness                                    | 1                      |
| Faithfulness                                 | 1                      |
| Humour                                       | 1                      |
| I can make higher choices                    | 1                      |
| Abundance                                    | 1                      |
| Truth                                        | 1                      |
| Simplicity                                   | 1                      |
| Ineffable nature of God                      | 1                      |
| Trust                                        | 1                      |
| Grace                                        | 1                      |
| Holism                                       | 1                      |
| Choice                                       | 1                      |
| Understanding                                | 1                      |

NB Sample Size: 60

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University of Derby, MultiFaithNet: [www.multifaithnet.org/](http://www.multifaithnet.org/)

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[www.religiousmovements.org](http://www.religiousmovements.org)

